BELARUSIAN REVIEW



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EDITORIAL

About Independence Days

Over two centuries ago the United States of America declared their independence from Great Britain. Years of the Revolutionary War followed, and the American people succeeded in defending their declaration and thus a new and thriving country was formed. The traditional celebration of 4th of July as the American Independence Day became well established over the years. It is celebrated officially by the White House and the Congress, in the capital, and less formally throughout the country with parades and patriotic gatherings. Multitudes of family picnics and barbecues complete the day.

American Declaration of Independence

(an excerpt)

We, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by the Authority of the good people of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United Colonies, are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent States;...
Philadelphia, 1776

Ninety years ago the Russian Empire fell apart as the result of the Bolshevik Revolution and the war losses. Many peoples of that multinational empire declared their determination to be independent. The empire's break-up provided some hope for Belarusians, after more than hundred years of brutal occupation that nearly caused their nation's extinction. Some of the new states maintained their independence for a few years, some for two decades, others did not survive the post-war years. Belarus, having declared its independence as the Belarusian Democratic Republic on March 25, 1918, was among the latter. During WW I the territory of Belarus was a continuous battleground, first between Russia and Germany, later between Poland and the new Soviet state. The 1921 truce line became the official border between them for nearly twenty years until the next World War. Belarus was thus divided between the warring states and its fledgling government was forced to go into exile. The March 25 date was to be celebrated for decades by the exiles and later by the growing diaspora as the Belarusian Independence Day.

Belarusian Declaration of Independence

(an excerpt)

A year ago the peoples of Belarus, together with the peoples of Russia, threw off the yoke of Russian tsarism, which had oppressed Belarus most of all, and without asking the people, precipitated our land into the conflagration of war which totally destroyed Belarusian cities and villages. Now we, the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, have cast off from our native land the last vestige of national dependence which the Russian Tsars imposed by force upon our free and independent land. From this time on, the Belarusian Democratic Republic is proclaimed an independent and free state....
Minsk, 1918

The yearly celebrations by the Belarusian diaspora outside of the Soviet Union stressed national revival and the hope for freedom and democracy in Belarus. Patriotoic speeches were followed by concerts and usually concluded by resolutions calling for the restoration of independence. They were staged by the local communities with support from national organizations and the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile. Staging such events in the Soviet Union would have resulted in immediate arrests of the participants and a sentence to a gulag for the organizers. The historical memory of Belarusians in the Soviet republic, the BSSR, was being thoroughly eradicated. The achievements of their ancestors were either ascribed to other nations, or deleted from encyclopedias and textbooks.

At the break up of the Soviet Union, Belarusians took a two step approach toward renewed independence. The first was the declaration of sovereignty of the BSSR in 1990, the second – the declaration of independence of the Republic of Belarus in 1991. It was accompanied by the restoration of the historical flag and state symbols, with the Belarusian language flourishing. July 27, 1991, was designated as the Independence Day and recognized as such for the next four years. Election to the presidency of the unabashedly populist Alexander Lukashenka, a former collective farm chairman driven by a vision of restoring the Soviet Union with himself in the Kremlin, reversed the revival. Almost immediately, by means of a tightly controlled fraudulent referendum, the Russian language regained its dominance, the Soviet-era anthem, flag and symbols were reintroduced, and the day of the reentry of Soviet troops into Minsk in 1944 became the next official Independence Day.

Nonetheless, however slowly, the historical memory started coming back to the younger generations of Belarusians. The 1918 date became known as Freedom Day at first, later becoming a more credible alternative to the officially celebrated holiday. The diaspora that has steadily grown as a result of the worsening situation in the country, now plans a series of events commemorating the 90th anniversary of the Independence Declaration. At a conference scheduled for March 2008 in Prague, the representatives of Belarus' democratic forces will meet with a number of supportive international figures, as well as with exiled Rada's President Ivonka Survilla. Within Belarus, the democratically oriented population will take part in rallies, concerts, protest marches, despite official prohibitions and physical repressions. The spring of 2008 may provide a glimmer of hope that the autocratic rule will not last forever, and that the hope expressed 90 years ago will soon become a reality.

And finally that, in the not too distant future, the people of Belarus will celebrate their chosen Independence Day in peace, secure in the knowledge that they are the masters in their own land, free to use their own language, practice their chosen religions, and develop their own culture.

Walter Stankievich

From the Publisher

The year 2008 can provide an outstanding opportunity to inform those around us about Belarus and the country's struggle against its authoritarian regime. This year, the democratic forces in the country, as well as those in diaspora will mark the 90th anniversary of the Declaration of Belarusian Independence, proclaimed on March 25, 1918 in Minsk.

The 90th Anniversary will be widely celebrated with special intensity in Belarus by all who value democratic freedoms. In the various diaspora communities proclamations marking the occasion will be issued by the mayors, governors and various governmental officials. Articles in the local press will inform the readers about the desire of the Belarusian people to be free. In educational institutions at all levels, compositions, papers and major theses may be written.

This publication is ready to provide background material for various projects related to the Anniversary, ranging from press releases, articles, student papers and conferences, to guidelines for proclamation requests and speaker invitations. (The e-mail and postal addresses are on the back page of this publication.)

But it is up to you as individuals, or as organizational activists, to insure that the 90th Anniversary of the Belarusian Independence Declaration is properly celebrated and widely acknowledged.

In the past issue we recognized the individuals who have contributed generously to this publication. This time we are expressing our thanks to the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile for covering the cost of subscriptions for political and governmental leaders in many countries. Their awareness of the situation in Belarus can be helpful in advancing the cause of democracy.



MERRY CHRISTMAS!
HAPPY NEW YEAR 2008!

FEATURES

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
UNITED STATES HELSINKI COMMISSION
An independent Agency of the United States Government charged with monitoring and encouraging compliance with with the Helsinki Final Act and other commitments of the 56 countries participating in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

The Future Belarus: Democracy or Dictatorship?

The United States Helsinki Commission conducted a hearing on the political situation in Belarus on December 4, 2007.

We bring you below excerpts from testimonies by **Hon. Alcee L. Hastings**, chair of the Commission and by the following witnesses from Belarus: **Mr. Alexander Milinkevich**, leader of the NGO "For Freedom," **Mr. Anatol Liabedzka**, chairman of the United Civic Party, and **Ms. Enira Branitskaya**, a Human Rights Activist.

Hon. Alcee L. Hastings

Welcome to this Helsinki Commission briefing examining the prospects for democratic change in Belarus – a country located in the heart of Europe, but which has the unfortunate distinction of having the worst human rights and democracy record in the European part of the OSCE region.

I am very pleased that we have with us today a delegation of courageous leaders of Belarus' democratic opposition and leading human rights and democracy activists. The delegation is being hosted by the International Republican Institute and I appreciate IRI's help making their presence here possible.

I must say that I feel a special connection with our speakers, as all were closely involved in the March 2006 presidential elections. As President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, at the time, I led the OSCE election mission to those deeply flawed elections.

.... At the post-election press conference the day after the 2006 elections, I stressed that "the Belarusian people deserve better" than the status quo. Regretfully, in light of the intervening twenty months of continued repression and stagnation, this remains my message today. Lukashenka has missed opportunities to liberalize the economy and the political system, but has chosen to maintain tight control over these and other aspects of society, especially when it comes to the media.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to commend the courage and commitment of the members of the delegation present here today, who, along with their colleagues in Belarus, are struggling for democracy, freedom and respect for human rights under very trying circumstances. Indeed, some of their colleagues, including Alexander Kazulin and Andrei Klimau, continue to languish in prison, while others disappeared nearly a decade ago without a trace.

Mr. Aleksandr Milinkevich

Political prisoners and political repression are hot topics for Belarus. During the last year, the practice of preventive detentions has become popular before those of civic and political nature. For instance, the police did not detain any participants of the European March in October. However, according to human rights defenders, 50 people were detained and received fines and short jail sentences 30 days before the rally. ... It is not always possible to provide legal assistance to them. Attention to such cases is insufficient; as of today the solution to the problem of preventive detentions has not been found. (*Continued on page 32*)

U.S. Secretary of State Met with Belarusian Oppositionists

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with a group of Belarusian opposition leaders in Washington on December 3, the U.S. State Department announced in a statement. Rice reiterated the United States' support for the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people, and said the United States will continue to speak out for the cause of freedom in Belarus.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, December 3. 2007



George Bush Met With Belarusian Democrats

A meeting between President George W. Bush and the delegation of the Belarusian opposition took place at the White House on December 6. The talks with the president lasted for an hour instead of the scheduled 40 minutes.

Here's what Aliaksandr Milinkevich, attending the meeting, says:

"Taking into consideration the significance of the meeting and the time limit, it was difficult to choose top priority questions. The president started discussion, asked concrete questions, and demonstrated his good familiarity with the Belarusian situation. He said: 'Imagine you are Bush and what you can do for Belarus.' "

Milinkevich said the talk with George Bush was meaningful and businesslike. After the talk, the president showed his office to the Belarusian delegation.



Meeting the U.S. president

"We spoke about support of media in the country, TV channel BelSat, and civil society. The issues of coordination of international policy in relations with Lukashenka's regime were also discussed," said Milinkevich.

Ambassador to Belarus Karen Stuart was also present at he White House meeting.

Beside the meeting with the president, the Belarusian delegation held a press conference at the Radio Liberty office. Later, a telebridge with the radio president, Jeffrey Gedmin, was organized. And a meeting with the Belarusian community was scheduled to take place in the evening.

Yesterday, a hearing entitled "Belarus: From Dictatorship to Democracy" took place at the US Congress, as well as meetings with the leadership of the Marshall Fund, director of International Republican Institute Lorna Craner, members of the National Endowment for Democracy and Germany's Ambassador to the USA Klaus Scharioth.

The Belarusian delegation included Aliaksandr Milinkevich, leader of the "For Freedom" Movement; Anatol Liabedzka, head of the United Civic Party; youth leader Paval Seviarynets; Siarhey Kaliakin, leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists; Anatol Liaukovich, deputy head of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada); Zmitser Fedaruk, one of the Young Front leaders; and Enira Branitskaya, aformer political prisoner and currently a human rights advocate.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, December 7. 2007

Opposition delegates meeting the Belarusian community



The Anti-Freedom Agenda

By Fred Hiatt

The official White House photo caption revealed the administration's wishful thinking.

"President George W. Bush meets with seven leaders of pro-democracy political parties and NGOs from Belarus, the last dictatorship in Europe," the caption declared, "during their visit Thursday, Dec. 6, 2007, to the Oval Office.

" Such a meeting did indeed take place. But "the last dictatorship in Europe"? With Vladimir Putin having mocked democracy in a sham election in Russia just five days earlier, the well-worn phrase sounded almost antique. The relatively inconsequential nation of Belarus may have appeared, not so long ago, as an outlier, ruled by a buffoonish former collective-farm chairman who failed to understand that freedom's tide soon would wash him away.

But on Bush's watch, that tide has receded. The president's "freedom agenda" has been taken more seriously by its enemies than by its authors. And those seven beleaguered leaders of Belarusan democracy, patiently making the rounds of Washington yet again, could be forgiven if they took some grim satisfaction that their long-belittled warnings were coming true.

"I remember European politicians not so long ago saying, 'Maybe it would be good for you to merge with Russia, Alexander, and you would get rid of your dictator,' " said Alexander Milinkevich, recipient of the 2006 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought from the European Parliament. "Today no one is going to say that."

Milinkevich and his traveling companions have little in common but their devotion to democracy for their post-Soviet country of 10 million people and the courage to fight for it against long odds. A Communist, a Social Democrat, a Christian Democrat and so on, they will cheerfully be at each other's throats once democracy comes to Belarus.

For now, though, they are united in the unglamorous work of resistance -- finding printing presses that are soon shut down, printing newspapers that are soon confiscated, going to prison, getting out of prison, helping the families of those who remain in prison. And, every now and then, cycling through Washington, looking for moral support, trying not to be forgotten

In that framework, it was admirable of Bush to spend an hour with them Thursday. "I know your problems, don't tell me about your problems," the president told the delegation, as one participant recounted afterward. "Tell me how I can help solve your problems."

Yet an administration that truly understood their situation would be doing much more. It would pay for news broadcasts over satellite television, not just shortwave radio. It would not cut back on democracy assistance in neighboring Russia, or Ukraine, or other post-Soviet states. Most of all it would face the reality of a gathering anti-freedom bloc.

Belarus's strongman, Alexander Lukashenko, was in Venezuela over the weekend, visiting Hugo Chavez. This week Russia's Putin will make his first foreign trip since consolidating one-party rule in his sham election, to see Lukashenko. The three leaders have virtually nothing in common -- except that they see democracy, and therefore the United States, as a threat.

The Bush administration consistently has expected Russia and China to cooperate in areas of mutual interest, as if the nature of their regimes were irrelevant. Surely Russia does not want a nuclear Iran, the administration would reason. Surely China does not want instability in Burma, its southern neighbor.

But even more than the refugees and AIDS spilling out of Burma, the survivors of Tiananmen Square may fear the success of a nonviolent democratic movement there, just as Putin shudders at democratization in Ukraine, Georgia or -- should the ice ever begin to break -- Belarus. And more than fearing mullahs with missiles, Russia may value the chance to thwart America and so diminish its pro-democracy clout.

This isn't to say that for Russia and China the anti-freedom agenda always trumps other priorities, any more than democracy always comes first for the United States. But while Bush has pushed the freedom agenda inconstantly -- violating human rights norms at home; encouraging and then abandoning democrats in places such as Egypt -- the authoritarians have heeded his rhetoric and opposed it doggedly, because for them survival is at stake. "

'The last dictatorship' -- I think this may be optimistic," Milinkevich told me. "The path from totalitarianism to democracy turns out not to be so easy. And freedom, it turns out, is not given once and for forever."

Source: *The Washington Post* Editorial, 10 December 2007, Charter 97 Press Center.

Minimum Life

If you turn up in Belarus with $134 in your pocket, it should be enough for you to survive for the whole month. The Ministry of Labor and Welfare has set the monthly minimum living-wage at 289,110 Belarusian rubles ($134). In other words, one person should be able to ensure his physical existence with about $ 4.5 a day.

For Belarus, with its prices not radically different from that of Poland or Lithuania, this is quite an optimistic estimation of people's needs. Well, the guys at the Ministry of Labor and Welfare have all grounds to be optimistic: according to their information, government officials enjoy the highest average monthly salaries in Belarus - $515 (not including extra payments and services they enjoy). Farm workers with $210 a month are the lowest-paid category of Belarusians.

Source: *Nasha Niva*, NearBY Blog / Mr. Octopus 26 October 2007

Out with the Old

By Rodger Potocki and Iryna Vidanava

The Belarusian government remains repressive. But the younger generation is getting restless.

The end of the Belarusian democratic opposition's autumn "marching season" has highlighted several important developments in the country's youth movement. As was the case with the protests after the fraudulent March 2006 presidential elections, young people made up the majority of opposition supporters taking part in the recent European, Forefather's Eve, and Social marches. What is new is their increasingly independent stance.

During the European March, young demonstrators defied the decisions of the state and of opposition leaders, formed a separate column, and marched down Minsk's main avenue. Prior to the Social March in November, youth leaders again declared that they would not follow the route approved by authorities and agreed to by opposition planners. Two separate protests took place. A group of about 200 young people met at the site of the March 2006 demonstrations, marched down the city's main avenue, passed the KGB building, and ended in Independence Square, where several dozen stood on the steps of parliament, displayed their banners, and sang patriotic songs.

While this drama may have made the marches more colorful, the events themselves were both poorly attended and organized. The division of the marchers symbolized the growing divide between younger and older opposition generations. Young activists were disappointed in the conformism and caution of the opposition leadership, which was frustrated that tens of thousands of the new generation didn't turn up to show their support for pro-European and pro-democratic views.

YEAR OF SETBACKS

In 2007, hope and disappointment have become common, though misunderstood, terms used to characterize Belarusian youth. Recently dashed expectations are a result of youth activism coming of age in 2006. That year, young people emerged as the most active part of opposition society. Youth organized and led the post-election protests. Describing the March demonstrations, a parent explained, "Our children led us onto the streets." Of the more than 1,000 people arrested, most were young, including many who had never before been active in opposition circles. They protested the regime's electoral fraud, while pushing the opposition leadership to be more confrontational.

The struggle didn't end with the destruction of the "tent city" in October Square, where many young protesters were living. Throughout the summer and fall, young people continued to protest by wearing their "For Freedom" pins, organizing flash mobs, and carrying out hunger strikes and other demonstrations. The upsurge in youth activities scared the ruling regime, which retaliated by detaining, arresting, expelling, and firing hundreds of young people. The repressive atmosphere of 2006 was captured eloquently by a photograph of a Belarusian mother outside a detention center holding a hand-made sign that read, "looking for my son."

This year has been no different. The European Union, U.S. Embassy in Minsk, and Amnesty International have criticized the ongoing campaign against youth. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka plays the role of the good, but stern, "father" to his people, but he is being challenged increasingly by a new generation of disobedient sons and daughters.

Security services frequently visit the families of youth activists to advise them on how to raise their children. It seems at times that the regime is paying more attention to this new generation than to the leadership of the democratic opposition. The regime fears young activists more than any other segment of the opposition and has put them squarely in its crosshairs.

In September alone, more than 100 young activists were detained and dozens imprisoned. The regime continues to use "anonymous tips" of dead bodies, rape, explosives, drugs, and trafficking to harass young activists, and it has trumped up charges of obscene language and other instances of "indecent behavior," "hooliganism," and "disrespecting society" to jail them.

One student was expelled from university and another young activist lost her job for political reasons. A youth activist was sent forcibly to a hospital for a psychiatric examination by the KGB. A leading opposition youth group was denied registration. Two young journalists received warnings for working for foreign media. And court cases have been filed against 96 graduates of educational institutions who refused to accept mandatory, state-assigned work placements.

LOOKING WEST, NOT EAST

Both sides of the political divide in Belarus realize the importance of youth in the battle for the hearts and minds of citizens and in the country's future development. There is no doubt that Belarusian youth are largely pro-European and pro-democratic. While to many observers, Belarus seems to be a museum for all things Soviet, young Belarusians today belong to both worlds, east and west. They move easily between languages and travel to countries in the EU and Commonwealth of Independent States. Most see their future in Europe.

A decade ago, surveys augured of this collective mindset; they found that young Belarusians had no "nostalgia for Soviet times ... and would prefer to see the West European model" established in Belarus. In a 1997 national poll, more than 54 percent of young respondents favored democracy, while only 42 percent of the total population sample did. Among university students, support for democracy was 81 percent.

The statistics aren't much different today, despite the paucity of studies. A 2007 Gallup survey indicated that more than half of those ages 18 to 35 would vote for a candidate for change in the 2008 parliamentary elections, compared with less than a third of those between 36 and 55 and less than half of those older than 56. A recent Belarus Institute for Strategic Studies poll shows that in the choice between

joining a union with the EU or Russia, young people overwhelmingly would choose Brussels over Moscow.

The dramatic outburst of youth activism and the appearance of so many new faces in 2006 raised the hopes of many domestic and foreign observers. They quickly anointed the March Youth as "the new force" that finally would bring about change, seeing in it a group intent on achieving results. Other experts discounted the impact of the movement by stacking it against the regime's massive ideological indoctrination and repression of youth. They predicted either an apolitical and apathetic generation or a legion of young Lukashenka followers.

By summer 2006, it was obvious that most of the new political or civic youth initiatives that appeared during the protests were incapable of establishing strong and effective structures. Bunt! (Revolt) is a good example. Bunt! was established by youth who previously were unengaged politically but were active in the March protests. After bonding through arrest and imprisonment, its founders promised to establish a "different kind of youth group, not like the others." But a combination of government repression, poor organization, and internal dissention decimated the group, which today is a shadow of its former self.

Other youth initiatives, like Khopits! (Enough), were created only for the elections and never intended to continue. The March events even contributed to the demise of one of the most recognizable of the established youth groups. Zubr (Bison) announced that, in response to the new situation, it would fold and continue its fight against the regime "as a part of a broad nationwide movement."

Flash mobbing, the best known of the post-election youth activities, was also a brief phenomenon, at least on a mass scale. Immediately after the March crackdown, there were regular instances of young people who, notified via the Internet and text messaging, would suddenly descend on a public space and hold events to demonstrate solidarity, freedom of association, and a rejection of the regime. Some of the more imaginative antics included groups protesting the lies of state television by putting scarves over their eyes when the news was broadcast on an outdoor screen in October Square; reading the Belarusian Constitution near the Ministry of Justice; destroying and throwing away copies of the state newspaper Soviet Belarus; and launching black balloons during Lukashenka's April inauguration.

By the summer, however, flash mobs had significantly decreased, as many young people had left for vacation. Moreover, as security forces figured out how to track the planners and cracked down on participants, the frequency of flash mobs declined. As one youth leader reported, "It was no fun to take part in a three-minute performance and then spend three hours in the police station."

A MARCH HIGH

The majority of the March Youth lost their enthusiasm when they realized that a quick victory was not possible. They turned away from political and civic battles and returned to normal life.

The eruption of sudden activism was not transformed into systematic activities, in part because the new young activists lacked experience working in established organizations, formulating short- and long-term objectives, and implementing them according to a plan. It turned out that the old-fashioned ideas of training, fund-raising, and organizational development scorned by Bunt! and others as unexciting and ineffective were necessary after all. In turn, however, experienced civil society groups failed to build bridges with the new activists or to provide them with the support necessary to survive growing pains, especially in conditions of repression.

Moreover, after being expelled from schools or fired from jobs, many of the country's best and brightest left Belarus in search of better opportunities. Eighty percent of those who leave Belarus to work abroad are students.

But while the scale of activities may have declined, the in-your-face attitude remains. One of the most important outcomes of 2006 is that the youth movement has lost much of its fear. Even at the Presidential Management Academy, the educational institution closest to Lukashenka, 250 students signed a petition against the expulsion of a peer for his political activities. This courage has helped a small number of the March groups redefine their goals, revise their strategies, and find their niche in the democratic movement.

Inicyjatyva (Initiative), for example, decided to focus on carrying out carefully prepared street actions aimed at overcoming apathy and anxiety among young people. By placing a premium on security, diversifying its activities, and working face-to-face with young people, it had organized more than 50 street happenings and actions without any arrests since March.

Until 31 October, when a group was grabbed in October Square because its Halloween costumes "resembled those of criminals," according to the police. Still, Inicyjatyva has placed opposition flags on the tallest buildings around the city to protest the regime; held a "Day of Flowers for a Good Mood" by handing out 2,000 tulips to people on the streets, including police and soldiers; and celebrated the "Day of Knowledge" by delivering a funeral poster with a picture of a Belarusian-language textbook, a black ribbon, and mourning flowers to the Ministry of Education to protest the disappearance of the Belarusian language from the state educational system.

While few new youth groups have emerged, some established youth civic organizations have benefited from the March events. These organizations have adopted the new activists' signature forms of resistance and self-organization, such as flash mobs and online communities. Many of the new activists have joined and rejuvenated old structures, like Antifashyk (Antifascism) and Malady Front (Young Front).

Celebrating its 10th anniversary, Malady Front is one of Belarus' oldest and best known youth groups. While many of its former and current leaders have been imprisoned or forced into exile, its ranks have been replenished by the March Youth. Malady Front has borne the brunt of the regime's repression since 2005. Denied registration five times by the state, its members continue to be detained and imprisoned for the criminal offense of being active on behalf of an unregistered organization. The new activists,

many of them still under legal age, have helped Malady Front survive and thrive.

When criminal cases were opened against three members in September, scores of young activists, together with other civil society leaders, arrived at the court to express their solidarity with their peers, despite threats of arrest and persecution. Those on trial were fined but not locked up. While some supporters at the court were detained, fined, or imprisoned for a few days, youth activists appeared to have won a moral victory. The example of Malady Front illustrates the regime's quandary: its heavy-handed repression only seems to spur greater resistance.

Editor's Note: The second part of this article will appear in the next issue of *Belarusian Review* (Spring 2008). It will deal with the following topics:

- **Disenfranchised young generation.**
- **Generation gap** between young activists and older opposition leaders.
- **Hidden in Plain View:** While most young peaople are politically passive, many are not apathetic, participating in a broad range of independent activities. "Lots of small clubs are popping up, like mushrooms after rain."
- **Virtual dissidents:** young people are increasingly merging their activism with the Internet.
- **Opposition doesn't get it, either.**

HISTORICAL DATES

November 3, 1882

The birthdate of **Jakub Kolas -** an outstanding Belarusian poet of the national reanaissance era.

November 26, 1930

The birthdate of **Uladzimier Karatkievic -** a noted Belarusian writer of the Soviet era. Most of his works dealt with Belarus' history. Deceased in 1984

December 9, 1550

Barbara Radzivil crowned in Vilnia - becomes the Grand Duchess of Litva and Queen of Poland.

December 15, 1850

The birthdate of **Mikalaj Sudzilouski-Russell**, known as an activist in 19th century liberation movements, a scientist and doctor of medicine. He helped to organize Bulgarians' 1876 uprising against the Turkish rule. Lived and worked in Western Europe, USA, Hawaii. In 1900 elected a senator, and in 1901 the president of the republic of Hawaii.

January 28, 1588

Third and final edition of the **Statute** (Collection of Laws) of the Grand Duchy of Litva was published and ratified. The Statute is a unique monument of the medieval Belarusian judicial thinking and literature.

January 30, 1667

Truce of Andrusava concluded between Grand Duchy of Litva and Duchy of Moscow, terminating the bloodiest war in Belarus' history (1654-1667)

Belarus' Forum

Compensation Lukashenka's Style: 10,000 Soviet Rubles Exchanged For Less than USD 10

In 1994, one of the main issues in Aliaksandr Lukashenka's pre-election campaign was the "compensation for the population's lost money deposits due to the 1985 currency exchange rate of one ruble to one dollar" (that is, one US dollar for one Soviet ruble). Moreover, Lukashenka promised to return part of these deposits in kind - in TV sets and refrigerators. In 1998, already as the president, he issued a special decree ordering compensation to be paid by January 1, 2008. And now, after 14 years of his "much-promising" rule, those Belarusians who hadn't received neither TV sets nor refrigerators are being invited to visit the Belarusbank.

They are given back their deposits. But the exchange rate is amazing : 500 Soviet rubles for ... 999 Belarusian rubles. Just for comparison, a metro ticket costs 600 Belarusian rubles... Isn't that a mockery?

The experience of post-Soviet countries suggests that lost deposits can be returned in the way the person is satisfied and the state doesn't go broke.

For instance, in the neighboring Lithuania not only land has been returned to its real owners, but deposits have been returned in proportion of 1 to 4. It means USD 2,500 for 10,000 Soviet rubles. The exchange rate of one Soviet ruble for one Lithuanian lit was chosen. Now one dollar is worth 2.35 Lithuanian lits.

A well-known economist Leanid Zaika, in an interview with the Charter'97 Press Center, said: "At the end of the 1980s, the ruble/dollar ratio was about 1 to 4. That is why it was completely logical to choose this rate. The calculations by economists of that time period indicate that the real correlation of labor productivity was 1 to 4 as well. The National Bank of Lithuania fulfilled the state obligations for returning the deposits. And it was an achievement of a state ruled by law, and not simply a promise of some politicians."

Here we have exactly the opposite situation. Having promised mountains, Lukashenka returns the Belarusians just a few pitiful kopeks.. Recently the newspaper *Express-Novosti* reported: children of the parliament "deputy" Mikalai Dubovik tried to visit the Belarusbank in order to get their once-lost deposits.

"Recently my children have been invited to the bank, complained Mikalai Dubovik at the last plenary session. There were five children in our family, and we all have our own children. Before his operation, my father made deposits for all his grandchildren – 1, 000 or 500 rubles each. My younger sister bought a trailer for 500 rubles. She turned out to be the smartest. My second sister (also younger) bought a large men's wedding ring for 500 rubles. Yet my own children, if they visit the bank tomorrow, will receive 999 rubles. We shouldn't turn the young people against the authorities this way. Let's suspend this matter , if it is possible. I, for instance, won't let my children visit the bank."

Dubovik didn't say how to "suspend this matter." Most likely, he suggested that the lost deposits should not be returned at all. One may become really furious when told about such a "compensation" amount. Or burst into tears, feeling insulted.

They are being offered less than 10 dollars for deposited 10,000 Soviet rubles, which, in 1980s, sufficed for building a 2-room cooperative apartment . They scrounged for years for such an apartment - and now all they can buy is half a kilo of half-smoked sausage. What a compensation…

Can you imagine how much money has not been paid out? Tens of millions of dollars… What was it spent on? On building ice hockey stadiums, artificial support of half-ruined collective farms and enterprises, various celebrations on the collective farm standard?

And how many promised refrigerators and TV sets never reached the deceived Belarusians? Yet, if the state doesn't have that many refrigerators, the lost deposits could have been compensated in other ways.

"Repayment is possible; that's not a problem. Return the money possibly in square meters of state property or land. Giving away 15-20 billions worth of state property is simple. For those 10 thousand rubles everyone would agree to get 2 hectares of land or a whole floor in a new apartment house. However, now the whole matter has been soft-pedaled. This is the last act of a robbery - a disrespect for our own country, for our own people," thinks Leanid Zaika.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, Nov. 13, 2007

United Civic Party leader urges Putin To "Confirm Security Guarantees" to Belarus

The leader of the United Civic Party on Wednesday called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to "confirm security guarantees" to Belarus, according to a statement posted on the party's website.

Anatol Liabedzka made the call just one day before the Russian leader is scheduled to fly to Minsk to hold talks with Aliaksandr Lukashenka on a Belarusian-Russian union.

The politician's appeal indicates the opposition's fears that Mr. Putin could use the coming talks to insist on a merger between Belarus and Russia.

In the appeal, Mr. Liabedzka called on the Russian president to declare Moscow's readiness to honor a 1994 deal that guarantees security and independence to Belarus.

The agreement was signed by the Russian, UK and US leaders after Belarus promised to give up nuclear weapons.

"I was directly involved in the events that took place in the Hungarian capital 13 years ago and regard the agreement as a serious achievement and success of the Belarusian side," Mr. Liabedzka said. "This agreement makes it possible to make a direct appeal to the leaders of the three major countries, suggesting that they confirm in public their readiness to honor their international commitments regarding our country. And it may become a barrier to political speculation concerning Belarus' sovereignty."

Mr. Liabedzka was beaten up by riot police as scores of opposition activists demonstrated in downtown Minsk on December 12 in protest against the feared damage to Belarus' independence from Mr. Putin's visit. .

Source: BelaPAN, Belorusskiye Novosti, December 13, 2007

Entrepreneurs Don't Want To Become "Unitary PrivateEnterprises"

November 10 was the deadline for the entrepreneurs who wanted to re-register as legal entities under preferential conditions. The Ministry of Economy of Belarus informed that more than 9,000 individual entrepreneurs have submitted documents for re-registration as unitary private enterprises. Meanwhile, Belarus counts more than 200,000 individual entrepreneurs. Thus, less than 5 per cent have yielded to the massive propaganda campaign launched by authorities and aided by state-run media to promote re-registration from individual entrepreneurs into unitary private enterprises.

According to entrepreneurs their unwillingness to re-register into unitary private enterprises is due not only to possible higher taxes, but also serious penalties that may be applied to unitary enterprises.

Valer Levaneuski, leader of the entrepreneurs' movement, told the Charter'97 press center, that "today only those with no other way out: transporters, dentists and others of that ilk, or swindlers", have re-registered into unitary enterprises. "An honest entrepreneur wants nothing to do with such a company; he or she will go broke after the first inspection". Levaneuski called it *Prodrazvyorstka* in Belarusian way. (*Prodrazvyorstka* was a governmental program during the Russian Civil War, which obliged peasantry to surrender surpluses of almost any kind of agricultural produce for a fixed price).

This is why entrepreneurs dealing in individual and retail trade preferred to legalize parts of their businesses in the name of their subordinates or relatives. In Levaneuski's opinion, this is dangerous, but "one chooses the lesser of two evils."

The point is that tax burden of unitary enterprises considerably exceeds that of individual entrepreneurs. At least half of those few who have re-registered into unitary enterprises will go broke next year already or will be forced to look for another from of ownership.

However, according to Levaneuski, the greatest danger lies in the fact that , when it re-registers into a unitary enterprise, a legal entity must be registered in its place of residence . "Most entrepreneurs will will have difficulty finding a suitable place of business; this is why they will register in their place of residence. This may create a precedent , when tax service, police as well as other controlling bodies may visit your apartment and, without consent of other family members, perform an inspection or even worse - a confiscation. A very unpleasant scene, I must say", thinks Levaneuski.

In his view, the authorities haven't left other choices for entrepreneurs except for to unite in protest or work illegally.

Aliaksandr Makaeu, head of the public association "Coordinate Council of the Entrepreneurs of Belarus" supports Levaneuski's views. "Since the authorities are speaking with us in the language of ultimatum , we are forced to come out to the Kastrychnitskaya Square and deliver an ultimatum to the authorities", declared Aliaksandr Makaeu in an interview with the Charter'97 press center.

According to Makaeu, many entrepreneurs only now began to understand that the authorities aren't joking and are not going to make any confessions. "People have now grasped , that we need solidarity to achieve our objectives and defend our rights. We should unite and come out protesting; only then we'll manage to achieve anything", said Aleksandr Makaeu.

"The authorities don't simply deprive people of work and their usual way of life. They deprive people of their bread, since most entrepreneurs are not in demand on the labor market because of their age or state of health, yet today are able to earn their living with retail trade. Younger entrepreneurs who are able to work in industry, won't do it; they are used to relative independent and freedom. That's why the authorities want to destroy us as a sufficiently independent category of the society", thinks Aleksandr Makaeu.

In connection with this, Aliaksandr Makaeu said he was sure that the protest action scheduled for 10 December on Kastrychnitskaya Square will take place under any circumstances: "Of course, the authorities will exert pressure on us. Especially on the activists, but we are ready for it. The small-scale entrepreneurs have really nothing to lose anymore. Most of them have understood it".

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, Nov. 13, 2007

European March: Reactions

On Monday, October, 15 the organizers of the European March have tallied up the results of the action.

"The European March has shown that the opposition is able to work together consolidated, which was questioned after the Congress of Democratic Forces," said Viktar Ivashkevich, coordinator of the March.

"European March is a fest of disobedience, setting people free before the next year, which will become the year of economic crisis and struggle for independence," believes Vintsuk Viachorka, chairman of the Party of Belarusian Popular Front.

"Some 7,000 people took part in the European March, but, unfortunately, they are not brought into play during the routine work of the opposition. Few of them will go to the streets to disseminate flyers. If we manage to accomplish this, the next actions will be more numerous", said Anatol Liabedzka, head of the United Civic Party.

Aliaksandr Klaskouski, *Nasha Niva* political commentator, writes in his blog "Dots Over 'i'", that the European March has reminded him of the events of March 2006:

"For the first time since March 2006, there were white-red-white flags over the October Square, and Milinkevich was speaking from the steps in front of the Palace of Labor Unions. A flock of youth was jokingly suggesting whether they should put up tents, using the rare chance of having a rally here."

"Some time before, while approaching the Circus building, I was looking out for the usual sight of shiny 'cosmonaut' helmets, but was amazed to see that there was no police cordon. Unstopped, people were freely marching towards the Palace of Labor Unions."

"The regime has shown fantastic liberalism and decided not to turn the city center into a 'Star Wars' shooting area (riot policemen in their bulky outfits remind me of the 'clone attack.')"

"There are no illusions about authorities changing their way of thinking in some magic way. Still, European March has shown that the regime has to take democratic demands of Europe into consideration. In other words, the outside factors are tightening their grip over the regime's throat."

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, October 15, 2007



BELARUS into Europe!

Belarusians Suffocated by Taxes As Nobody Else in the World

The World Bank and Price-Waterhouse-Cooper company have conducted research to determine which country's tax system is more favorable for business. Belarus makes it most difficult to pay taxes. Our country has occupied the last 178th position.

Belarus has been included in the same company as Panama, Jamaica, Mauritania, Bolivia, Gambia, Venezuela, Congo.

A Belarusian firm is supposed to submit 124 declarations a year (as compared to 1, computerized, in Sweden). Obstacles are being created in the development of large business, while small and medium-scale business has to resort to semilegal schemes.

China shouldn't be envied as well (with its 168th position) and India (165th position). Russia takes the 130th position in the rating, behind Montenegro, Vietnam and Hungary. And it's simpler to pay taxes in European states and developed countries on other continents, even considering that taxes there are higher.

Source: Charter 97, Nov. 21, 2007

The Letter of the Law

Can a couple of letters or commas affect the political situation in the country? In Belarus, the country where the language issue has always been highly topical, this is already the case.

The bill regulating the rules of the written Belarusian language was adopted by Belarusian parliament at the first reading on Oct. 24. When it becomes a law (there are no doubts about that) Belarusian orthography and punctuation rules will be slightly altered. However, the change itself is not as important as the very fact of the language reform. It is very much likely, that in the nearest future no form of Belarusian orthography other than the official one will be allowed for use in mass media. Why is this so important? Here's the catch: the leading independent media outlets adhere to "tarashkevitsa", the unofficial Belarusian orthography.

Some history

The Stalin's rule has not only eradicated the Belarusian intellectual elite, but also transformed the Belarusian language. The language reform of 1933 introduced significant changes to the Belarusian language, making it look and sound more similar to Russian. In the early 1990's the pre-reform orthography, the so-called "tarashkevitsa" was revived by the opposition, as opposed to "narkamauka", the russified version of Belarusian.

"narkamauka" vs "tarashkevitsa"

Today, the whole system of Belarusian education, all state-owned and many independent mass media use the official, "narkamauka"-based variation of the Belarusian orthography. "Tarashkevitsa", however, became the language of cultural protest against the policy of russification, which continues under the regime of Lukashenka. The statements and leaflets of oppositional parties are often printed in "tarashkevitsa"; it is also widely used by the free-thinking internet users on blogs and forums. The leading independent Belarusian-language media, such as the Belarusian Service of Radio Liberty and *Nasha Niva* also use „tarashkevitsa". If the use of "tarashkevitsa" is delegalised, they will face a tough choice. Should the independent media go even deeper underground or remain legal but bending their neck and switch to the new orthography?



Aliaksandar Radzkou

During the bill's presentation in the Parliament, Aliaksandar Radzkou, Minister of Education, told the deputies that "in some cases the problems of the unity of Belaruisian language get politically colored. This law will become an effective instrument of stopping the unreasonable and illegal use of the so-called "tarashkevitsa" in the press". According to Radzkou, the bill should "ensure the unity of the Belarusian-language press".

Zmitsier Sauka, Belarusian linguist and one of the authors of the new codification of "tarashkevitsa" rules, believes that the new law will only make the unofficial grammar more popular within the freethinking public.



Zmitsier Sauka

Surprisingly enough, some former champions of "tarashkevitsa" are seeing the bill as a possible chance to unify the nation and strengthen the position of the Belarusian language.

Siarhey Dubavets, who was the driving force behind the re-launch of *Nasha Niva* in 1991, have stirred a controversy by saying that it was a mistake to promote "tarashkevitsa" as opposed to "narkamauka" in the 1990s. He believes that accepting a single set of language rules would bring Belarusians closer together.



Siarhey Dubavets

On one hand, the new law will probably be used as a repression tool. Bending to the will of authorities would be a humiliation to the independent press. On the other hand, the "language bill" may indeed help to overcome political barriers created by the confrontation between "tarashkevitsa" and "narkamauka". The choice will not be an easy one, but there's still time to think it over: the new law will come into effect on Sept. 1, 2010.

Source: *Nasha Niva* NearBY Blogs, 25 October 2007

QUOTES of QUARTER

"Individual commitment to a group effort — that is what makes a team work, a company work, a scoiety work, a civilization work."

VINCE LOMBARDI, American football coach

Man of the Month: Siarhey Siamionau

Winning a court case against the state is something nearly unthinkable in the authoritarian Belarus. Siarhey Siamionau, 26, is the person who proved that it still may be possible.

Siarhey Siamionau is a Belarusian citizen studying in Ukraine, that is why he regularly crosses the Belarus-Ukrainian border. During one of such trips Belarusian customs officers asked him to fill out the customs form in Russian language. Siarhey Siamionau demanded a form in the Belarusian language, which the customs officers didn't have. The fact is, Belarusian-language customs forms are simply non-existent in Belarus. The customs officers acted in a usual nature of uniform-wearing officials: they accused Siamionau of obstructing their work. As a result, on Aug. 30, the central district court in Homel fined Siamionau with more than $400.

On Sept. 9, Siarhey Siamionau crossed the border again, and the situation repeated. However, this time it caught the attention of Ryhor Vasilevich, Chairman of the Belarusian Constitutional Court. Vasilevich named the case of Siamionau as one of the most characteristic examples of disrespect towards the Belarusian language. His pro-Belarusian language speech during the seminar on international standards in human rights issues hasn't passed unnoticed. On Oct. 4, Siarhey Siamionau was acquitted by the same court (but by a different judge).



Siarhey Siamionau

For Siarhey Siamionau, it was a matter of honor to defend his language rights. "When the criminal penalty for participating in the non-registered organizations was introduced, many people had to abandon their activities in order not to be in conflict with the law. If the state wants that we obey the laws, then we also have the right to demand the same from the state."

Siarhey Siamionau believes that the next step may be to demand the right for higher education in Belarusian and the use of the Belarusian language in the Army.

Siarhey Siamionau was chosen the "Man of the Month" by the readers of nn.by, who voted for him in a recent internet poll of *Nasha Niva.*

Source: *Nasha Niva*, NearBY Blogs, October 6, 2007

Anniversary of the Slutsak Military Action

87 years ago, on November 27, 1920, the units of the Slutsak Council of BNR (Belarusian Democratic Republic) began their fight against the invading Russian Bolshevik forces.

About 70 people from Miensk undertook a memorial trip to the Slutsak region. The expedition consisted of activists of the Belarusian Popular Front and representatives of the Committee for Honoring the Victims of Stalinist terror. They laid flowers at memorial crosses in the towns of Slutsak, Hrozau, Vyzna, Semezhava.



In contrast with similar actions held in the past, this time militia abstained from harrassment and limited its role to mere watchful observance. Authorities of the Minsk region officially sanctioned the trip.

On November 27, 2007, a cross was also installed on the territory of the National Kurapaty Memorial - in memory of the Slutsak fighters, who later perished in Soviet GULAGs.

Source: Radjo Racyja, and Radio Liberty, November 27, 2007.

Belarus' Intellectuals Ask for Rehabilitation of Larysa Heniyush

A public committee to commemorate Stalin's victims, the Union of Belarusian Writers and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee have written to Belarus' Prosecutor General Piotr Miklashevich, requesting to rehabilitate Belarusian poetess Larysa Heniyush.

The letter was signed by over 70 Belarusian intellectuals, including academician Radzim Haretski, historian Ihar Kuzniatsou, renowned poet Nil Hilevich, writers Ales Pashkevich and Vasil Yakavenka, human rights activists Tatsyana Protska and Harry Pahaniayla.

In 1948, Larysa Heniyush was repatriated from Prague where she acquired the Czechoslovak citizenship. She was arrested and sentenced to 25 years in prison for "assisting the international bourgeoisie and carrying out hostile activities against the Soviet Union" and for "counter-revolutionary activities". The poetess was freed only on November 1, 1956, yet the unfair conviction was not cleared, reports BelaPAN.

Source: Web site Belradio.fm, Nov. 3, 2007

ECONOMY

Washington Expands Sanctions on Belarus

By David Marples

On November 14, the United States Treasury announced financial sanctions on the Belnaftakhim gas and chemical conglomerate and its subsidiaries outside the country. With this maneuver, Washington expressed its dissatisfaction with the Belarusian government's failure to improve the human rights' situation within the country. It follows other moves directed against the Lukashenka government by the EU and the United Nations.

The recent sanctions comply with the order given by U.S. President George W. Bush permitting the Department of the Treasury to freeze assets of those individuals or companies believed to be responsible for human rights violations in Belarus. The United States has blocked the undisclosed personal assets of 16 Belarusian officials, including President Alexander Lukashenka, since last year. The EU, meanwhile, has expelled Belarus from its preferential list of partners, a decision that became effective in June 2007. It is estimated, however, that the annual losses incurred by Belarus from this move will amount to ¤12 million annually, or about 0.4% of the value of all Belarusian exports to the EU. In this sense, the punishment might be considered more symbolic than severe.

On November 21, the United Nations General Assembly committee dealing with social, humanitarian, and cultural issues accepted a draft resolution led by the United States, the EU, Canada, Israel, Japan, and Switzerland that condemned the continuing violations of human rights in Belarus and demanded that the government adhere to international standards in the conducting of elections. The resolution was approved by 68–32, with 76 abstentions (Charter 97, November 22). Likewise such admonitions have become somewhat ritualistic, given the Minsk government's apparent refusal to change its ways.

The impact of the sanctions on Belnaftakhim is harder to assess. Some analysts believe the company has a relationship to Belarus similar to what Gazprom is to Russia – one of the government's principal assets. It consists of 38 enterprises, of which 23 are industrial companies. It includes chemicals and oil output, transport, and procurement technology and employs about 120,000 people. Over 70% of the output produced by Belnaftakhim divisions is distributed to 90 different countries. The company accounts for about 35% of the exports and over 30% of the country's industrial output. The most important export products are mineral fertilizers (especially potassium chloride) and oil products. The company has offices in Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, Germany, and China, and a subsidiary firm, Belnaftakhim USA. New company branches are being created in Turkey and Poland.

Belarus's response to the U.S. decision was two-fold. On the one hand, a protest note was handed to U.S. Ambassador Karen Stewart on November 15. The authorities claimed that the new sanctions were "illegal" and derived from exclusively political motives. It demanded that the company's assets be immediately unfrozen. The note also stated that the decision of the Bush administration was contrary to the norms of international law and WTO trade guidelines. It also reportedly violated the current trade agreement between the United States and Belarus, by which Washington agreed to promote the supply of Belarusian goods and services on the U.S. market.

On the other hand, the Belarusian side was insistent that the new sanctions would not affect the smooth operation of the Belarusian economy. Speaking to the German-run Minsk Forum conference, Uladzimir Sizou, head of Belnaftakhim's oil processing arm, remarked that the only branch of the company affected was the one in United States. He maintained that the sanctions would not impede the transport of crude oil through Belarus or domestic oil refining. A separate report suggests that Latvia will suffer adversely from the sanctions, as transport of Belnaftakhim exports in 2006 yielded the Baltic country some $174 million in transit fees that will now presumably be lost. Some impact may be felt by other enterprises, such as the Mazyr oil refinery, which sells the United States about 50,000 tons of gasoline monthly.

Belarusian analyses have speculated that the united stance of the United States and the European Union on human rights violations and the need to release political prisoners in Belarus may be undermined by the new sanctions, since the Europeans, in their view, do not support these additional measures. However, there has been no overt opposition from Brussels to the announcement from Washington, and similar sanctions on EU trading with Belarusian companies would be potentially devastating to the Belarusian economy.

The direct financial impact on Belarus of the sanctions is difficult to gauge without access to Belnaftakhim company records. What is clear, however, is that the country's energy sector has come under intense pressure over the past year through increased costs of imported oil and gas from Russia and a distinct cooling of relations with its traditional ally. The U.S. sanctions step up the pressure on the Lukashenka regime's main economic asset: reprocessed oil products, which, at 54% of the total volume of exports, are the country's most important export item outside the boundaries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Although the latest sanctions may not elicit immediate internal changes, they may lead the Belarusian government to seek new accommodation with Russia or to make some concessions to the demands of the EU – perhaps by releasing some prisoners. Other options seem distinctly limited.

(*Belorusy i rynok*, November 19-26; www.charter 97.org, September 25, November 22; *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*, BelaPAN, November 23; *BelGazeta*, November 19)

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, November 29, 2007

Debt-Privatization Cocktail: A Tool to Avoid the Debt Trap?

By Kiryl Haiduk

Energy price hike has coincided with the growth of foreign indebtedness. Does it mean that Belarus has embarked on a potentially dangerous path? The BISS experts point that the policy 'mix' of foreign borrowing and privatization will drastically reduce this possibility in the short- and medium-run. At the same time, much has yet be done to avoid vulnerabilities associated with increased indebtedness, including, among other aspects, the reform of the real sector of the economy.

Balance-of-payments problems offset by foreign borrowing

The government officials recently expressed some worries concerning the current account situation. By the end of the current year, the current account deficit might exceed 5% of GNP. This is a close to a dangerous threshold as the experience of the East Asian economies (once suffered from the 1997 financial crisis) suggests. complicated by energy price hike that might cost, according to some estimates, up to USD 1.2 billion.

Likewise, foreign debts have been growing since the end of the last year. Some observers link it to the energy price hike by stressing that "the country has started 'to tick'". According to Leanid Zlotnikau, debts are partially utilized to satisfy the consumer appetites stirred up by growing real wages (above productivity rates). The situation is perceived as more dramatic due to the impact of the energy shock. But the latter is not to be considered as the single major driver of foreign indebtedness.

Prevalence of short-term debt

The National Bank of Belarus reports that in 2006, the volume of gross foreign debt went up by 34.2%, while in the first half of 2007 this volume increased by more than 38%. Between April 1, 2006, and July 1, 2007, gross foreign debt grew from more than USD 5 billion to almost USD 9 billion (or by 73.3%). Major borrowers are commercial banks and other sectors of the economy (that typically incorporates enterprises). The share of banks and other sectors of the economy account for 86% (as of July 1, 2007) of the total volume of foreign indebtedness in contrast to 80.9% at the beginning of 2006. However, since nearly all of the companies and banks borrowing are state-owned, the total figure is roughly equivalent to the public debt. As for the terms of foreign indebtedness, short-term debts prevail. Over the last year and a half, the ratio of short-term to long-term debt has been 72% against 28%. Similar figure is observed in the case of bank indebtedness, while for the other sectors of the economy the share of short-term debt was 85% at the beginning of 2006 and then dropped to 79.5% by July 1, 2007.

In the Asian economies, debts were also accumulated by commercial banks and enterprises, but the ratio of foreign debt to GNP was higher than in Belarus now. In Belarus in 2006, the ratio of foreign debt to GNP was 18.6% (dropping from 27% in 2002), but by the end of the current year it can be expected that this figure would be around 25%. In contrast, in the Asian economies, foreign debt to GDP ratio was ranging between 28% in South Korea, 35% in Thailand to 51% in the Philippines (48% in Indonesia and 42% in Malaysia).

The increase in the volume of foreign borrowing is related to the interest rate differences between Belarus and foreign countries. Western markets offer much less 'expensive' loans. For instance, banks in Russia has long been utilizing foreign loans to provide mortgage loans at the domestic market, but now facing certain troubles with rollover. Belarusian banks have probably followed this suit to some extent. Growth of the Belarusian economy requires more funds so banks are gaining advantage of the difference in the costs of funds between Belarus and the rest of the world. Furthermore, foreign borrowing may be used, according to Stanislaw Bahdankevich, as a substitute for the subsidies that the Belarusian economy used to rely upon.

The dominance of the short-term debts may eventually lead to their roll-over, which can be problematic given that Belarus is immature borrower at the international financial markets. The government is clearly concerned about circumstance, as can be confirmed by the obtaining of the credit rating in August 2007. Standard & Poors assigned its B+ long-term foreign currency and BB long-term local currency rating, while short-term rating is B. According to the agency's definition, 'an obligation rated 'BB' is less vulnerable to non-payment than other speculative issues. However, the country that received this rating still faces major ongoing uncertainties or exposure to adverse business, financial, or economic conditions, which could lead to the obligator's inadequate capacity to meet its financial commitment on the obligation'. Nevertheless, BB rating allows Belarus to count upon less harsh terms of foreign borrowing.

Perils of indebtedness

The availability of funds to borrow abroad is not the key issue for the Belarusian economy. Commercial banks and enterprises can have debts in foreign currency, but as many of them receive payments for their goods and services in the local currency, devaluation will drastically increase debts for many domestic banks and enterprises. In Mexico, lifting up the limits of the currency fluctuation up to 13% (in October 1994) led to a crisis (driven by investors' mass sale of the dollar-denominated bonds issued by the Mexican government). In Belarus, devaluation is not just an economic but also a political problem. The government sets dollar-denominated wages as one of the key benchmarks of domestic economic performance. Since devaluation reduces the dollar value of ruble-denominated wages and thus consumption prospects (that are, as some experts argue in the course of the BISS conference, one of the blocks of state-building in Belarus), it has to be avoided by any means. Indeed, the sale of the mobile operator 'Velcom' to an Austrian company has been driven by the need to offset the consequences of a small-scale 'bank run' at the end of the last year. According to some unofficial estimates, during the last month of 2006 the National Bank lost about one-third of its foreign exchange reserves to defend the value of the Belarusian ruble.

The most important issue for the Belarusian economy is whether it will be able to efficiently utilizethese funds, or they will be wasted to boost consumption or finance senseless public investment projects. The financial system of Belarus is characterized by the preservation of 'political controls' over a range of sectors and even individual enterprises. This includes provision of preferential loans, lower tax rates, etc. The state subsidization is not the absolute evil as such, but in such countries as Belarus it is often loss-making enterprises that have been provided with funds. However, the National Bank reports that the share of 'bad loans' is rather low (around 3% over the last one year and a half). The share of non-performing loans appears to be lower than in the East Asian countries before the 1997 crisis (8% in Korea, 13% for Thailand and Indonesia, and 14% in the Philippines). However, some experts claim that this figure might actually be higher than the one provided by the National Bank (due to some improper accounting measures by commercial banks).

Support for inefficient industries continues

The government authorized several policy measures to make the provision of state assistance to economic actors conditional upon their performance. Managers have been made responsible for the economic performance of their companies, although the government clearly prioritizes fulfilling the state-mandated output targets rather than indicators of efficiency (such as profitability). Furthermore, the government is unwilling to give up the levers of economic controls. The volume of state support provided to the Belarusian enterprises increased by 21% from USD 1.2 in 2005 to USD 1.9 billion in 2006. Over the last year, more than a half of the funds allocated to assist individual economic units had been provided as the budget loans and subsidies. About 30% of the total volume of state support attributed to tax exemptions. Some loss-making companies were not restructured, but 'nationalized': the state increased its share in the statutory funds in exchange of provision of financial support. It has to be noticed, however, that the total volume of losses by inefficient enterprises is not dramatic: in 2006, it amounted for 0.4% of GNP, or about 140 million USD. Unless this number dramatically grows, the state can afford to continue the practice of tolerating inefficient industries for some time.

The political business cycle

There is another important constraint that the government is hardly to break with, namely the use of the political business cycle. Within its framework, wages and incomes (are lifted up often above productivity levels) prior to the important political events like elections and referenda, whereas a more active industrial policy is being carried out in the post-election periods, which is accompanied by the suppressing the wage increases. Upward wage dynamics crowds out investment, being that financed by the state or enterprises themselves. As a result, economic growth rates might be decelerated.

Over the last two years, the gap between real wages and productivity is closing down. As a result, more funds have been available for investment. Over the last three years, investment has been growing faster than real wages (31.4% as against 17.6% in 2006), while gradually the share of long-term investment in the total volume of investment increased from 40% in the end of the 1990s to 53% in 2006. Nevertheless, investment growth has decelerated since the mid-2007 due to the decreasing availability of investment funds after the energy price hikes. It may be forecasted that the next stage of the political-business cycle, the acceleration of real wage growth before the elections of 2008 and 2001, will meet even tougher constraints given the continuous energy price growth. As a result, the authorities will be induced to find resources abroad to ensure the uninterrupted work of the political business cycle. On a more positive note for the government, in 2008, the political business cycle can be not about wage increases, but about the return of the 'social benefits' withdrawn by the current parliament, so wage dynamics could be depressed. Given the budget surplus, provision of social benefits could be reinstalled with no effects on economic growth or inflation.

Privatization as a cushion

The government appears to understand the long-term perils of foreign indebtedness, and hence is willing to authorize some privatization in order to raise cash from other sources. The first notable deal is the sale of 12.5% shares of 'Beltransgaz'. The revenues would also be obtained in the next several years until 50% are sold. Two deals have been made in August 2007 after the failure of the government to obtain a 1.5 bn loan from the Russian government. But the government is still counting on its obtainment in order to finance bilateral trade and economic relationships.

The first is the sale of 99.72% of shares of 'Motovelo' J.S.C. (at BYR 15.6 billion, or about USD 7.3 million) to Austria's ATEC Holding GmbH. The Austrian company has promised to invest as much as USD 20 million by 2012. However, the major privatization deal is the sale of 'Velcom' to the Austrian telecommunication company. Recently, negotiations have been held between the President Lukashenka and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Russian holding 'Sistema' on the sale of the Belarusian Company 'Integral'. Some other talks have also been held, including the possibility to set up a joint venture between Svetlogorsk-based 'Himvolokno' and Austrian chemical company, 'Glanzstoff Austria GmbH'. Earlier this year, the government officials mentioned that they would induce major exporters to utilize IPO or private placement for sale at the Western financial markets. Privatization is occurring behind the 'closed doors' not only because of its 'bureaucratic', or 'nomenclature' character, but also because the authorities do not want to create the impression that the situation demands some urgent steps, which can bring down the value of assets up for sale. Accordingly, some privatization-related negotiations have to be conducted now, when no serious economic challenges are experienced.

Furthermore, the authorities actively woo "greenfield" investments in Belarus. Beside multiple reports about negotiations with potential investors in real estate from Arab countries, Iran, and Venezuela, there is an obvious increase of interest in the Belarusian economy from Russian business, as can be confirmed by the October visit to Minsk of the oil tycoon Roman Abramovich. According to the opinions of some experts, he discussed some joint oil project and/

or real estate investment. As for the latter, 'Itera' has been active to propose building the 'Minsk City', a USD 7 billion project to be realized between 2010 and 2020.

It appears that the Belarusian authorities are willing to sell well-performing companies. It is the petrochemical enterprises and other leading exporters that could go to the funds in the West. This has two important implications. First, by making case-by-case deals, the authorities efficiently check privatization, and reserve the possibility to either slow it down (or stop it) or facilitate it (in case foreign exchange is urgently needed).

Second, the selling of 'family silver' first means that the privatization is, paradoxically, used as another instrument to avoid restructuring of companies and industries that cannot survive without state support. To put it briefly, the government is looking for cash that it can raise without going deep into reforming the problem areas of the economy. Hence, these problem areas continue to exist as a time bomb that may explode in the event if the inflow of foreign funds in the form of investments of loans is interrupted.

Conclusions

• A full-fledged pre-sale preparation of Belarus has not yet began. Instead, privatization is being utilized to minimize the risks related to foreign indebtedness and also ensure macroeconomic stability.

• Belarus has chosen a dual-track strategy of adjustment to external shocks, combining foreign borrowing and the stop-and-go privatizations as a hedge against possible interruptions related to foreign debt. The scale of privatizations in Belarus is influenced by the size of the current account trade deficit.

• Debt pyramid is unlikely to appear in the short- and medium- run. The authorities seem to be aware of the dangers of non-rollover so they attempt to tackle the possible lack of foreign exchange with having a joker card of privatization in their sleeves. In the case of financial difficulties, such instruments as the IPO or private placement could be used to obtain additional revenues.

• To sum up, the Belarusian economy seems to be capable of surviving regardless of the growth of foreign debt and mounting current account deficit over the short to the medium term. Still, the survival strategy of the Belarusian authorities tends to overlook longer-term challenges of the loss of efficiency and competitiveness by a bulk of the industrial sector that is no longer capable of generating the revenues, as the policy mix of privatization and borrowing, among other things, postpones restructuring of true problem areas of the Belarusian economy.

Source: Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 12 November 2007

QUOTES of QUARTER

"The best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class."

ARISTOTLE

Fairy Tales by Prakapovich

The authorities have lost their conscience completely. Yesterday Piotr Prakapovich, the chairman of the National Bank of Belarus again outraged Belarusians by the fantastic nature of the official statistic data. The country's chief banker declared without a trace of embarrassment that in January-September of this year average monthly inflation reached 5.4%, or 0.6%. The question arises: perhaps Prakapovich gets all his food from a closed distribution network of the Soviet type, where all items in short supply were fabulously inexpensive? What other explanation could there be for not knowing that this year prices of milk and meat have grown by 40% (even Prime Minister Sidorski has admitted that). We are now paying 23.1% more for electricity and 23% more for gas. The utilities bills have risen 10.1%, public transport services 15.1%, taxi fares have grown20%, butter has become more expensive by 80%, and the price of vegetable oil has grown twice!

Where does the National Bank's chairman get these surreal figures? The well-known economist Leanid Zlotnikau answers this question for the Charter'97 press center:

"There exists a certain method of price analysis, that results in such inflation rate figures. And there exists a specific calculation method. The Ministry of Statistics (MS) uses a consumer goods and services basket consisting of 350 items. However, the trick lies in what does this basket include. For instance, the Economy Ministry publishes a monthly digest "Consumer markets prices in Belarus". According to this digest the price of beef was about BR 7,500, and, for instance, price of pork about BR 7,500 as well. As a consumer you go to shops or markets and will certainly never buy foodstuffs only at this price. Yet the Statistics Ministry's consumer goods basket includes only such goods. They are so called socially significant goods. The state monitors their prices. This is why you will find such meat in every shop, because the state checks its availability and low price. Rising prices of many goods are not considered important. It is more important that stores have these cheap foods available." This is how the economist reveals the secret of forming a consumer goods basket in Belarus.

Thus, only very poor people can live according to Ministry of Statistics's rules. "People, who consume low-fat milk from polythene bags, popular sorts of bread with more or less regulated prices, people who wear very inexpensive clothes. Although, if you wish to wear normal clothes, you won't be able to find anything cheap anymore. Most people don't buy lard with bones, skin and tendons instead of meat. THe MS counts only low-quality products, " says Zlotnikau.

The economist notes that there are "many tricks" in the Statistics Ministry's calculations :

"They contain many sophisticated tricks. There exists a certain methodology and they follow it. The MS officials admit that a retail price index is needed to reflect the real situation.

The official statistic is likely to supply the wrong data not only on inflation rate, but also on growth of the GDP and other indexes.

"The GDP index is working only for the market economy. It has this peculiarity: it should indicate how the population's incomes are changing. However, we estimate the GDP using the productive method. That means if the goods remain unsold, it doesn't matter. And then, is it a real GDP? For example, two cars crashed and then had to be repaired. The scope of the repairs will be included in the GDP. Re-laying now rusting pipes, that are frequently breaking down , or paving the whole city with expensive materials, - all this will also be included in the GDP. This is how we get the GDP: it includes things wasted by the state, by the population, by the enterprises on reconstruction and modernization.For instance, if we build many roads, palaces, and pave roads with expensive material, - it doesn't mean that the portion consumed by the population is growing," notes the expert .

According to Zlotnikau, if the economy isn't reformed, Belarusians will face further price hikes – two or three fold.

"My only forecast is: prices will increase. About 10 years ago I wrote that due to protectionism, inefficient production, and rising prices of resources we consume, the food prices will also grow. This is an elementary forecast. When the food prices will be 2-3 times higher than in the neighboring countries, people will understand that we are preserving an inefficient economy. And if by now not everything has become twice as expensive, then soon it will be. This is what I have understood from the very beginning," said the economist.

Don't tell us fairy tales, Mr. Prakapovich! Or you are consuming food exclusively from your beggars' basket?

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, Nov. 2, 2007

QUOTES of QUARTER

"My definition of a free society is a society where it is safe to be unpopular."

ADLAI E. STEVENSON, American politician

"They took my knife, and my notebook. A completely clean notebook! I asked - why? It turned out - because it contained a map of the world. "

VOLHA KAZULINA, daughter of the political prisoner Aliaksandr Kazulin, about the search she had to undergo before visiting her father.

"I consider it very important that you see your future in Europe. I always thought that Belarus and Ukraine should join the united Europe, and that their border with Russia should become a border between two equal and cooperating partners — the European Union and the Russian Federation. "

VACLAV HAVEL, former president of the Czech Republic, addressing the participants of the European March in Minsk.

Thoughts and Observations

Lukashenka Fans Anti-Semitism in Belarus

By David Marples

At a press conference broadcast for the Russian media on October 12, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka criticized living conditions in the town of Babruisk, one of the centers visited by 70 visiting Russian journalists (SB-Belarus' Segodnya, October 13). The translated version of his remarks was as follows: "It was frightening to go in, it was a pigsty. It used to be largely a Jewish city; you know how Jews treat the place where they live. Look at Israel; I was there" (Pravda, October 19). He also commented that the situation in Babruisk improved only after the departure of the Jews and then suggested that "Jews with money" might wish to return to ameliorate the conditions (www.haaretz.com, October 19). Israel issued a protest but decided not to withdraw its ambassador, feeling that such a move would only exacerbate the diplomatic crisis.

Lukashenka's remarks did however provoke a response from Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who denounced them as anti-Semitic. He added that it was necessary to combat anti-Semitism wherever it might appear. The Israeli ambassador to Belarus, Zeev Ben Arie, stated that the president's comments brought back to life the anti-Semitic myth that Jews are "untidy, dirty smelling people" and gave the impression that the city of Babruisk was a self-functioning Jewish city rather than one in which responsibility for cleanliness and landscaping was in the hands of the authorities. He also noted wryly that it would be a good thing if Belarusian towns could match the social services of Israel and made reference to recent events in Belarus, including the desecration of Jewish graves in Babruisk and anti-Semitic slogans on a Jewish community home in Slutsk (*Jerusalem Post*, October 18; www.naviny.by, October 17).

The president's comments cannot be taken seriously. The Jewish population of Belarus was largely destroyed during World War II when about 800,000 Jews on Belarusian territory were killed by the Nazi occupation regime. Hitherto, cities such as Minsk, Hrodna, Vitsebsk, and Babruisk had vibrant Jewish populations in the Pale of Settlement of the Russian Empire that prevailed until 1917. Today, however, the country has a Jewish population of less than 29,000, of which about 4,000 live in Babruisk, comprising less than 2% of that city's population in 2005 (www.citypopulation.de/Belarus.html).

Of more importance is the question whether Lukashenka was using Jews as a scapegoat for current social problems, heralding an official anti-Semitic campaign. Two examples from his tenure as president raise disturbing questions. In a 1995 interview with the German newspaper *Handelsblatt*, the president reportedly remarked, "Not everything linked to a certain Adolf Hitler was bad. Recall the period of his rule in Germany. German order had grown over centuries and under Hitler this process reached its culmination. This

is in line absolutely with our understanding of a presidential republic and the role of its president." These unpublished remarks were run twice by a Belarusian radio station, although Lukashenka denied he had made the remarks in a December 8, 2003, interview with *Der Spiegel.*

Eduard Skobeleu, one of the president's close friends and editor of the newsletter of the presidential administration, is a well known anti-Semite, who has published articles in the Russian-language literary magazine Neman claiming that Jews seek world rule as well as maintaining the authenticity of the forged document "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." In December 2005 Lukashenka used the presidential website to congratulate Skobeleu on his 70th birthday (www.president.gov.by, December 8, 2005). In January 2006, the president awarded Skobeleu a medal for his "spiritual contribution to society" in the face of protests from Jewish organizations, which cited his 2005 book Stalin's Testament as making personal attacks on Jewish leaders in Belarus (www.fsumonitor.com/stories/010906Belarus.shtml).

Anti-Semitic outbreaks are not frequent in Belarus but they have occurred periodically under Lukashenka: in 2001 the authorities demolished a 19th century synagogue in order to build a housing complex. In the following year an attempt was also made by the authorities to close the Marc Chagall Institute of Jewish Studies at the Belarusian State University (www.ncjs.org/Belarus.shtml). In 2004, when the authorities disbanded the International Humanitarian Institute, they dissolved concomitantly the only Belarusian school that taught Jewish studies. Writing in 2002, Yakov Gutman, president of the World Association of Belarusian Jewry, commented that the Lukashenka regime was characterized by "aggressive anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic propaganda" (*Jewish Observer,* April 2002).

The most serious aspect of Lukashenka's most recent faux pas is the attempted perpetuation of a racist stereotype of a people that has been integral to the history of Belarus since the 14th century, and one that suffered persecution at the hands of the Russian Empire and the USSR, in addition to the occupation regime of 1941-44. The authorities' traditional response to Jewish fears about anti-Semitism has been to declare that it does not exist in Belarus. However, when the president himself disparages Belarusian Jews as he did at his press conference, such statements hold little weight.

At the least, the president is fanning age-old prejudices about Jews; at worst he is revealing the worst aspects of his own nature. Perhaps it is encouraging that his comments were not carried in the official media. But like his now decade-old comments expressing his admiration for Hitler, the key point is not whether the remarks were later denied or concealed, but the fact that they were made at all..

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, October 24, 2007

Lukashenka Comments Draw Accusations of Anti-Semitism

By Salome Asatiani

October 22, 2007 (RFE/RL) -- Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is known for his often unpredictable, and sometimes bizarre, outbursts.

But perhaps until now, he hasn't been known internationally as an anti-Semite.

Talking to a group of Russian journalists on October 12 about the past living conditions of the southeastern town of Babruysk, Lukashenka said, "It was scary to enter, it was a pigsty. That was mainly a Jewish town -- and you know how Jews treat the place where they are living."

"Look at Israel, I've been [there]. I really don't want to offend anyone -- but they don't care much about, say, grass being cut, like in Moscow," Lukashenka said, in comments broadcast live on national radio.

Lukashenka also called on Jews "with money" to return to Babruysk, once a thriving Jewish center. Last year, the town, as the host of a harvest festival, received a large injection of state cash.

Derogatory Myths

Despite his professed intentions, Lukashenka did cause offense. Israeli officials and Jewish organizations within Belarus have condemned his comments, which have raised questions about the rise of anti-Semitism in Belarus.

"In Belarusian and Russian societies, anti-Semitism is evident every day. Lukashenka wanted to demonstrate that he was one of them, a representative of this segment of the population," says the RFE/RL political commentator Valeri Karbalevitch.

Israeli Ambassador to Belarus Zeev Ben-Ari told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that Lukashenka was drawing on an old, derogatory anti-Semitic stereotype. Lukashenka's speech "alluded to the myth that I thought had died, at least among the progressive part of humanity," Ben-Ari said. "This myth sees the Jews as untidy and dirty people who smell bad -- and is undoubtedly anti-Semitic."

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said in a statement that "the role of leadership is to fight anti-Semitism wherever it raises its ugly head, all over the world, not to encourage it."

As a sign of protest, the Israeli Foreign Ministry considered recalling the country's ambassador to Belarus. The ministry decided against the recall, but summoned Belarusian Ambassador to Israel Ihar Lyashchenya to register "strong condemnation."

Rene van der Linden, the president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, has also criticized the comments, calling on Lukashenka to apologize.

With up to 28,000 people, Belarus's Jewish community is small. According to government statistics, the two predominant religions are Belarusian Orthodoxy (80 percent) and Catholicism (14 percent).

A Growing Trend?

The point -- if there was one -- of Lukashenka's comments remains unclear. Was this just a crude lapse or was it representative of a new anti-Semitic trend in Belarusian society?

Ambassador Lyashchenya refused to recognize the anti-Semitic character of Lukashenka's statement, saying that the president had "respect and a good feeling for the Jewish people." "Belarus and anti-Semitism are mutually exclusive things," he said.

But Valeri Karbalevitch, a political commentator at RFE/RL's Belarusian Service, said Lukashenka has made anti-Semitic statements in the past, for instance comparing dishonest oligarchs with Jews, or likening his critics to people with "hooked noses."

Lukashenka has "openly made such remarks to attract support, for both in Belarusian and Russian societies anti-Semitism is evident every day. Lukashenka wanted to demonstrate that he was one of them, a representative of this segment of the population," Karbalevitch said.

But this time, Karbalevitch said he believes that Lukashenka's comments were "simply a slip of the tongue." RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports that the president's comments have not since been rebroadcast or reprinted in state-controlled media.

It is unlikely that Lukashenka's comments represent a sizable increase in anti-Semitism in Belarus.

According to a 2007 U.S. State Department report on international religious freedom, in Belarus, "the number of individual anti-Semitic incidents increased during the reporting period. Anti-Semitism is tolerated by the state. Anti-Semitic acts were only sporadically investigated."

The report noted that, during the reporting period, several Jewish religious sites had been vandalized. Last week, vandals reportedly desecrated graves in a Jewish cemetery in Babruysk and daubed the gates with a swastika.

But Franklin J. Swartz, an American historian who has lived in Belarus for 10 years collecting oral histories of Belarusian Jews and working to restore Jewish cemeteries, said the level of anti-Semitism is remarkably low in Belarus.

"Compared to other countries in the immediate vicinity of Belarus -- such as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Russia, [and] Poland, especially — there is very, very little, and I would say virtually no societal anti-Semitism in daily life in Belarus," said Swartz, who directs the East European Jewish Heritage Project. "During the Soviet period there was a certain amount of institutionalized anti-Semitism. But now I find no examples of that."

Little Reflection on the Past

Belarus's recent history is pockmarked with the tragedies of anti-Semitism.

Before World War II, Jews made up about 1 million out of Belarus's entire population of 10 million. During the Nazi occupation, some 800,000 Jews were killed. Cities and towns -- including Babruysk -- turned into ghettos, labor camps, or mass graves.

Historian Swartz says that in postcommunist Belarus, the authorities have attempted to commemorate the Holocaust. "Every single town where there were Jews who were killed has an execution site that was put up by the government," Swartz said. "The wording during the Soviet period was that a peaceful Soviet citizen was killed by a fascist. Now, as they put up new ones, it is much more straightforward, and just says that Jews were killed by Germans and their collaborators."

Perhaps a deeper problem for Belarus, aside from the sporadic attacks on Jewish religious sites, is coming to terms with the past.

According to Karbalevitch, Belarusian society has not reflected deeply enough on the Holocaust.

"In Soviet times, talk of the Holocaust was hushed up," he said. "The Holocaust did not liquidate the anti-Semitic tendencies that have been present since even before the [October] Revolution."

Red Terror Remembered

Barys Tumar

Today is the most horrible day in the modern history of Belarus. In the night of Oct. 29, 1937, 80 people were executed in the vaults of the NKVD (Stalin's secret service, predecessor of the KGB). They were the pick of our nation.

Among those executed in this dreadful night were Alyaksandar Charnushevich, people's commissar of the popular education, Anani Dziakau, rector of Belarusian State University, outstanding writers Mikhas Zaretski, Mikhas Charot, Platon Halavach, leader of the patriotic youth Ales Dudar, renowned doctors, physicists, lawyers, pedagogues, chemists, geographers. All of them were accused of anti-Soviet activities.

Stalinists, similarly to the Nazis, strived to eradicate the elites of enslaved nations, in order to devoid them of future leaders – forever. On October 29, 1937 the machine of murder has reached the peak of its productivity. On the whole, from 1930 till 1941, no less than 600,000 people were repressed in Belarus, no less than 200,000 of them were murdered. These were the most educated, the most talented, and the most active people.

Belarus-born members of government and administration, Academy of Sciences, artistic unions were practically eliminated. Only 15 of 400 writers remained free. The purge destroyed the national school of historic science, wiped out businessmen, farmers and well-off peasants, religious activists (not a single Christian church was left in the Eastern Belarus).

Many of the arrested went through such tortures, that they lost will to live and craved for death as deliverance from suffering.

In some social groups, national communities and professional milieus only those remained alive, who either were saved by a miracle, or cooperated with NKVD.

Just like Nazis, Stalinists delayed the executions, because they planned to use the condemned as slaves. They also lacked technical resources to eliminate so many people in such a short time.

Those who were too famous, whose death would hurt the Soviets more than their life, survived. As Nazis didn't dare to kill Sigmund Freud, Stalinists left poets Kupala and Kolas alive. Still, there are terrible documents, which prove that Kupala was deliberately driven into a suicide attempt, and that Kolas has been sleeping for three years in full clothes, awaiting the arrest, which seemed immediate to him.

The nightmare became the everyday reality.

Such a well-planned, determined and cruel eradication of whole social layers was unprecedented. Old butchers were executed by new butchers, and the latter – by the new generation of "cogs," who erased the bloody footprints. Berman was executed by Nasedkin, Nasedkin was executed by Tsanava. The mass graves were destroyed by those, who didn't know anything about the people buried there. The WWII gave an opportunity to present them as the sites of Nazi crimes.

The terror was implemented in the name of the social utopia, but in practice it was a projection of the Russian imperial interest. Similarly, Nazis eliminated everyone, who was taking up their "Lebensraum." Everything was liquidated, even potential and hypothetical threats. The empires wanted to take over the world.

The scale of the catastrophe is so enormous that in many spheres Belarus has not yet made up for its human losses.

Stalin's time put a start to the degradation of the human potential of our rural areas. Prison customs began to substitute morality. No wonder – so many people went through prisons and labor camps.

We remember the victims. We remember the butchers. Eternal lights light up under the firs of Kurapaty and under prison walls.

Source: *Nasha Niva*, Oct. 30, 2007

HISTORICAL DATES

December 15, 1850

The birthdate of **Mikalaj Sudzilouski-Russell**, known as an activist in 19th century liberation movements, a scientist and doctor of medicine. He helped to organize Bulgarians' 1876 uprising against the Turkish rule. Lived and worked in Western Europe, USA, Hawaii. In 1900 elected a senator, and in 1901 the president of the republic of Hawaii.

January 28, 1588

Third and final edition of the **Statute** (Collection of Laws) of the Grand Duchy of Litva was published and ratified. The Statute is a unique monument of the medieval Belarusian judicial thinking and literature.

Belarus: 19-Year-Old Activist Fights For God And Country

By Heather Maher

For a man with a mission, Zmitser Fedaruk laughs more than one might expect.

He chuckles when asked what it's like to be 19 years old and leading 1,000 young democracy activists in Belarus, a country many people call the last dictatorship in Europe.

He laughs softly as he talks about the role Christian faith has played in his work opposing the regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, the country's Soviet-style leader.

And he can't supress a nervous giggle as he relates how his predecessor as head of Malady (Young) Front, the country's largest youth protest group, was arrested after returning from a trip to the United States. Fedaruk, who has traveled to Washington with a delegation of Belarusian activists, flies back to Minsk in three days.

On the question of freedom, however, the laughter stops. Fedaruk, a lanky youth with deep-set blue eyes, turns serious. He spent five days in prison early this year, after a group of Malady Front activists were detained simply for holding a meeting in a private flat, and he says the experience taught him a critical lesson.

"This year, when I was in the KGB prison, I finally felt how people take freedom for granted," he says. "It's only when people lose their freedom that they begin to value it. God gives all human beings freedom, and people need to value it."

Early Choices

Fedaruk has led Malady Front since September, stepping in for 26-year-old Zmitser Dashkevish, who was sentenced to an 18-month prison term for working for an unregistered organization. Malady Front, which was founded more than a decade ago, has never been granted legal status; the omission has often served as a pretext for crackdowns against the group.

Wearing an oversize gray suit jacket and a light purple dress shirt, the diminutive Fedaruk doesn't look the part of a political activist at first glance. A former professional-level soccer player, he'll still kick a ball around when he has time. But a closer look reveals clues about Fedaruk and his mission.

His necktie is emblazoned with the phrase "I love Jesus." On his right wrist, he wears a band with "Jesus" in block letters. And on his lapel, he bears a square red pin with an engaving of a charging knight on horseback -- a historic symbol of Belarus, now adopted by the opposition, known as "Pahonia," or "chaser."(**Editor's Note:** usually translated as "Pursuit")

The two influences, God and country, are both deeply significant for Fedaruk, and deeply irritating to the Lukashenka regime.

The young activist insists on speaking Belarusian, a politically charged decision in a country where the official language and dominant culture is Russian. Against the recommendation of his peers, Fedaruk studied the Belarusian lan-

guage in secondary school, and kept up his skills at home by keeping a diary. The more his friends objected to the risks of such a move, he says, the more determined he became to keep it up.

Fedaruk is also a devout member of the Pentacostalist faith, a form of evangelical Christianity viewed with profound suspicion by the Belarus authorities. Fedaruk's pastor, Antoni Bokun, was imprisoned earlier this year after the activities of his Minsk-based church were condemned and its premises confiscated.

Undaunted, Fedaruk now prays at a church that has lent some space to the abandoned congregation. "I believe in God," says Fedaruk. "And I fear only God."

'Freedom To Perform Good Deeds'

Religion, the 19-year-old says, has played an important role in helping him find his voice as an activist, and a leader. Filling in for Dashkevich, Fedaruk has found himself running meetings, organizing street actions, and coordinating protests with other opposition leaders. But he says he has also sought to serve as a spiritual and moral guide to the group, whose members regularly risk intimidation, beatings, and arrest.

"When I joined Malady Front I couldn't understand how people could stand up and be strong, and not be afraid," says Fedaruk. "Later, when I received this faith I understood that only God and faith can help you be brave. In fact, the young people who come to Malady Front are also like this — they are the new generation who can get to this new land."



Fedaruk's trip to Washington has put him on equal international footing with the "old" generation of the Belarusian opposition. The seven-member delegation, which met with Condoleezza Rice, George W. Bush, and members of the Helsinki Commission to spread information about their efforts at home, includes 2006 presidential candidate Aliaksandr Milinkevich, Anatol Liabedzka of the United Civic Party, and Siarhey Kaliakin of the Belarusian Communist Party.

It's heady company for a 19-year-old. But a powerful mix of patriotism and youthful determination make Fedaruk a convincing member of the group. His easy laugh quickly gives way to passionate eloquence, and his bearing is calm and confident.

Does he ever stop and ask himself what he's doing leading 1,000 activists and risking prison at age 19? Fedaruk laughs, slightly embarassed. As a child, he says, one of his favorite books was "Ivanhoe," Sir Walter Scott's swashbuckling historic novel about the battle between Normans and Saxons in 12th-century England. Early on, it cemented Fedaruk's notion of the ideal life: one dedicated to defending your country.

"Many people believe freedom means to be free to go shopping, to drink alcohol, to walk freely on the streets," Fedaruk says. "But to me and my colleagues, freedom means being free to perform good deeds."

He stands up to go, and points to his lapel pin -- the chaser. When his Belarusian ancestors conquered an enemy, he says, they would chase him to the very borders of Belarus.

Fedaruk is cautious of openly criticizing Lukashenka's regime, often opting for Biblical analogies over literal critique. But his smile is wry as he shows off his pin. The enemy is the current regime, he seems to be saying, and his goal is to chase it away.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, December 10, 2007

Editor's note: This profile was originally published on December 7, based on an interview conducted the previous day in Washington.

On December 12, Zmitser Fedaruk was severely beaten by riot police while taking part in a peaceful demonstration in Minsk. Fedaruk is now hospitalized in serious condition after sustaining internal injuries and being knocked unconscious.

The U.S. State Department "condemn[ed] the use of brutal force" against the protesters and accused Belarusian police of "specifically targeting" Fedaruk when they dispersed the rally. "This incident is another in a long series of repressive acts by the Belarusian authorities against their own citizens," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said.

The U.S. Helsinki Commission, which hosted Fedaruk and other opposition activists at a briefing during the Washington trip, has condemned the beating as "outrageous and tragic" and said "the intimidation and abuse by President Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime does not seem to be coming to an end any time soon." The commission's chairman, Congressman Alcee Hastings (Democrat, Florida), vowed in a statement, "My colleagues and I on the Helsinki Commission are determined to stand by young Mr. Fedaruk and all those in Belarus — young and old — struggling for freedom, democracy, and respect for human rights."

QUOTES of QUARTER

"Those who are too smart to engage in politics are punished by being governed by those who are dumber."

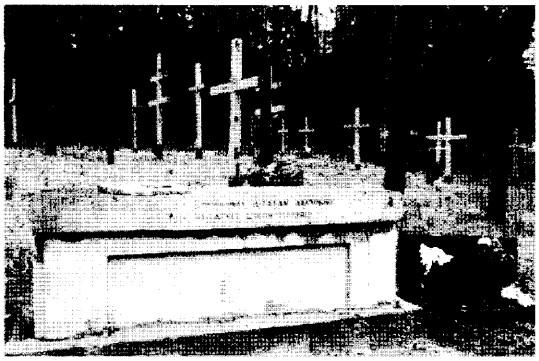
PLATO

Days of Remembrance In Minsk

By David Marples

Today, November 2, members of the European diplomatic corps, including ambassadors and their families, will visit the mass burial site of Kurapaty, recalling the 70th anniversary of executions conducted by the Stalin regime in Belarus. This event follows closely upon the commemoration on October 28—the eve of the Day of Remembrance of Ancestors (Dziady) in Belarus—when demonstrators visited the Kurapaty site and restored the "Cross of Martyrs" and a plaque given by the Americans during President Bill Clinton's visit to Belarus on January 15, 1994. The Day of Remembrance (October 29) is an annual event, held since 1988 when the mass graves were discovered by archeologist and political activist, Zianon Pazniak, who went on to create the Martyralioh association and, subsequently, the Belarusian Popular Front.

The gathering at Kurapaty received authorization from the Minsk Oblast Executive Committee on October 22, although permission for an initial rally near the center of Minsk was delayed until shortly before the event. The main organizers were members of Pazniak's political party, the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian Popular Front (CCP BPF), with support from the Party of the Belarusian Popular Front (PBPF) led by Vintsuk Viachorka. An art exhibit about the mass repressions under Stalin was also on display at the headquarters of the PBPF in Minsk. At the commencement of the rally, the marchers assembled on Independence Avenue near the Luch watch factory at 10:30 am and walked to the Kurapaty Forest, which is located some four kilometers north of the Malinauka district of Minsk, near the former settlement of Zialony Luh. According to a report by Syarhey Pulsha on the Charter-97 website, the number of demonstrators had swelled to 1,500 by the time they reached the gravesite at 2:30 pm.



"Clinton's bench"

Once there, the secretary of the CCP BPF, Valery Buyval, read a speech from the exiled Pazniak, which emphasized the importance of educating a new generation of Belarusians, commenting that achievements would be limited until a new and free Belarusian person emerged, with the same liberties accorded the national language and culture. A number of wooden crosses were installed at Kurapaty and the Cross of Suffering was restored, as was "Clinton's bench," a granite monument bearing the inscription "To Belarusians from the American people." Restoration was necessary because both have been repeatedly vandalized by unknown hooligans, including an attack on the Cross in the fall of 2005.

Commemoration of the victims of Stalinism has always been a difficult process in Belarus. On June 3, 1988, Paznyak and writer Yauhien Smyhalou published an article entitled "Kurapaty: The Road of Death" in the newspaper *Litaratura i Mastatstva*. The article revealed the discovery of mass graves containing between 30,000 and 150,000 victims, evidently of NKVD executions in the period from 1937 to the summer of 1941. The article led to a mass protest at the site on October 30, 1988. A government commission established to investigate the graves failed to reach any firm conclusions. The Communist regime also tried to ban the Martyralioh association and refused permission for the Popular Front to hold its founding congress in the republic. The Lukashenka government, which came into power in the summer of 1994, has repeatedly supported the claim of the former Soviet regime that responsibility for the executions lies with the German occupiers, signifying that the massacres took place after the end of June 1941.

Pazniak, however, noted that there were numerous eyewitness accounts of mass shootings in this area from 1937 onward. The bullets were fired by 7.5 mm "Nagan" Soviet rifles, and footwear worn by some victims bore the manufacturing date of 1937. The Belarusian government, however, does not consider Kurapaty to be a national historical site. In 2001 the area was threatened by a planned expansion of the Minsk ring road and only saved by a "tent city" of protesters, including members of the PBPF and Zubr. In October 2004 the Jewish community of Belarus erected a monument to Jews and other groups murdered in the forest. It is believed that the victims included native Belarusians, Jews, as well as residents of former territories of Poland incorporated into Soviet Belarus after September 1939.

The organizing committee for the demonstration is planning a second march on Sunday, November 4, to another massacre site at Lashytsa Park. It has appealed to the Belarusian authorities to protect the Kurapaty burial site of victims of political repressions and to find and prosecute those who have vandalized the memorials. It demands the inclusion of Kurapaty on the register of historical-cultural treasures of Belarus. President Alexander Lukashenka has paid homage to memorials of the German-Soviet war, which are lavishly maintained. In 2001 and 2003 he visited the Brest Fortress complex unveiled in 1971; and in July 2006 he and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez toured the non-government "Liniya Stalina" open-air museum west of Minsk, which opened in June 2005.

To date, however, his government has rarely paid attention to victims of the Stalin period and the NKVD in particular. Documentaries shown on Belarusian television frequently extol Stalin and his achievements. The president openly laments the end of the Soviet Union. But massacres on such a scale, which encompassed the elimination of the country's cultural elite, cannot be ignored indefinitely by a regime that purports to be constructing a Belarusian state.

(*Belorusy i rynok*, October 29-November 5; *Belorusskie novosti, Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta,* November 1; www.charter97.org, October 17, 28; Interfax, *RIA-Novosti*, October 28)

Source: Jamestown Foundation,Eurasia Daily Monitor, November 2, 2007

Belarusians Abroad

Action in Support of European March In Prague

People came to the Saint Vaclav monument on Vaclav Square in Prague to support the European March in Minsk. The white-red-white flags draw the attention of the numerous tourists.



Several action organizers handed the gathered people leaflets in English and Czech. There the latest appeal of the former Czech president Vaclav Havel was quoted, where he expressed hope that the freedom will win in Belarus.

"Lesson of Belarusian" Awarded a Prize

The documentary film "Lesson of Belarusian," produced by the Polish director Miroslaw Dembinski, won the prestigious European Council prize in the Prix Europa festival held in Berlin

The film focuses on March 2006 events in Belarus (protests against the results of manipulated presidential elections) and tells the story of the Jakub Kolas lyceum in Minsk and its students. The lyceum - the only secondary school with Belarusian as the sole instruction language - was closed by the authorities in 2005. **Source:** Radio Racja, October 22, 2007.

Youth Movement of the Belarusian Popular Front Gained Wide International Support

Youth Movement of the Belarusian Popular Front "Young Revival" has enjoyed tremendous support from its international partners in the last six months.

In July, 2007, the chairman of the YBPF "Young Revival" Mr. Raman Kavalchuk attended the 4th International Summer School of European Christian Political Youth Network (ECPYN) in Wuerzburg, Germany. The event was attended by a Dutch MP from a ruling coalition party of Christian Union, Mrs. Esmé Wiegman-van Meppelen Scheppink. The members of Christian youth organizations discussed various approaches to be used in European politics as the the Summer School's main topic : "Principles or Pragmatism? The Christian View on Government and Opposition." Delegates to the event have visited the Documentation Center of the Nazi Party rally site "Reichsparteitagsgelände" in Nuremberg and the headquarters of European Central Bank in Frankfurt am Main. Finally, the YBPF "Young Revival" was granted observer membership in the European Christian Political Youth Network.

On August 29th - September 2nd, 2007 the YBPF "Young Revival" was represented at the Summer School of another international center-right group: Democrat Youth Community of Europe (DEMYC) in the famous Slovenian resort of Portoroz. DEMYC has an advisory status with the Council of Europe. The Summer School was hosted by the New Generation of Slovenian People's Party, Slovenian Democratic Youth and Young Slovenia. The participants of DEMYC Summer School in Portoroz were given opportunity to discuss the main issue of the event, "Environment is ours. Healthy Environments for a Healthy Life" with directors of leading local energy companies: Mr. Martin Novsak from Gen Energija d.o.o. and Mr. Bostjan Napast from Petrol d.d. Delegates to DEMYC Summer School also visited the old Venetian town of Piran. Chairman of the YBPF „Young Revival" in his address to the 106th DEMYC Executive Committee meeting in Portoroz reviewed the political situation in Belarus and the information campaigns of his movement aimed to „resist Russian aggressive policy and promote closer relationships with NATO".

In November, 2007 representatives of the YBPF "Young Revival" attended a DEMYC seminar in Kyiv, Ukraine. The event was hosted by two Ukrainian youth organizations - Young Rukh (Movement) and Democratic Alliance. The participants held very productive discussions on the seminar's topic "Energy Security of the State. New Challenges for Europe and the World" with prominent experts such as Mr. Bohdan Sokolovskyy, Advisor to the Secretariat of the President of Ukraine and Mr. Oleksandr Todiychuk, Coordinator on Implementation of Memorandum Ukraine – EU in the energy sector and Professor at the International Institute of Management in Kyiv. During the second session of the DEMYC seminar in Kyiv delegates formed two working groups to discuss issues of „The role of the Council of Europe in the processes of contributing democratization in Belarus"" and „Energy Security of Europe. What should be done?," and to propose viable solutions to related problems. The 107th DEMYC Executive Committee Meeting in Kyiv was addressed by the chairman of the YBPF „Young Revival," Mr. Kavalchuk , who announced the new crucial campaign: of "Belarusian Way to the Nordic Cooperation" and by the vice-chairman of the Youth of BPF Party.

On December 5th-9th, 2007 the YBPF „Young Revival" has attended the Council Meeting of International Young Democrat Union (IYDU) in Tallinn, Estonia. IYDU is the most influential center-right youth organization in the world.

The IYDU Council Meeting was hosted by the Estonian Pro Patria Union Youth and Young Conservatives with support of the Finnish Youth League of National Coalition Party. The Council Meeting was attended by two Estonian MPs, Mr. Mart Nutt and Mr. Peeter Tulviste, former Rector of Tartu University, the British MP Mr. Andrew Mitchell, the former Estonian Ambassador to Russia Mr. Mart Helme and other prominent lecturers. It provided a great opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties with Young Republicans from the United States, young conservatives from the British Commonwealth and continental Europe. IYDU in cooperation with other international partners is working to establish an independent Belarusian Youth Parliament whose first sessions are scheduled to take place in Kyiv, Ukraine in 2008.

More information concerning the Youth Movement of Belarusian Popular Front „Young Revival" and its campaigns may be found on Website **www.youth-bpf.org**

MEDIA WATCH

PRESS REVIEW

Poland to begin news, cultural TV broadcasts to Belarus in attempt to bolster democracy (*International Herald Tribune*, December 7, 2007) — WARSAW, Poland: A new television station funded by the Polish government will begin broadcasting a mix of news, cultural programming and entertainment shows to Belarus next week — part of Warsaw's ongoing attempt to bolster democracy in its autocratic neighbor.

The station Belsat will hit the airwaves on Monday December 10, which is International Human Rights Day, and send shows into the authoritarian state ruled by longtime president Alexander Lukashenka.

"Our idea is to turn this station into a forum for uncensored discussion, which is now missing in Belarus," said Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy, director of the Warsaw-based station.

Poland, an ex-communist country now in the European Union and NATO, has for years expressed concern over the state of democracy in Belarus, a former Soviet republic of 10 million, strongly supported by Russian President Vladimir Putin's government.



Agnieszka Romaszewska

Warsaw is already supporting a radio station, Radio Racja, that broadcasts news programming into Belarus.

A unit of Polish state-run TV, Belsat will broadcast entirely in the Belarusian language, with programming prepared chiefly by Belarusian journalists working in both countries.

"It is going to be a TV station for Belarusians by Belarusians," said Aliaksei Dzikavicki, a former Radio Free Europe journalist who will oversee Belsat news programming.

The Polish government will be Belsat's main contributor, with the Foreign Ministry pledging 21 million zlotys (US$8.6 million) out of an estimated yearly budget for 2008 of 27 million zlotys (US$11 million), Romaszewska-Guzy said.

Additionally, Lithuanian public TV will produce a talk show. The Irish government has pledged to finance training for Belsat journalists.

The station will initially broadcast for four hours a day, but hopes to eventually increase that to 16 hours. Apart from news programs, Belsat will also show documentaries on human rights, programs on censored cultural events in Belarus and sitcoms such as "Ally McBeal"

Belsat estimates that more than 7 percent of Belarusian households own satellite dishes, which translates into about 700,000 potential viewers.

NEWS BRIEFS

The source of items in the NEWS BRIEFS section is the RFE/RL Newsline, unless otherwise indicated.

1. POLITICAL OPPOSITION

October 3, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION SUBMITS PETITION TO LEGISLATURE AGAINST REMOVAL OF STATE BENEFITS

Opposition leaders delivered some 40,000 signatures under a petition against the upcoming abolition of state benefits and privileges to the Belarusian National Assembly in Minsk on October 2, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Some 20 members of the group, including Belarusian Party of Communists head Syarhey Kalyakin, Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada) head Anatol Lyaukovich, and United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka, managed to reach the national legislature after scuffles with police who blocked the way to the building. "I worked in parliament for six years and never saw somebody preventing a person from entering the parliamentary building and approaching his representative," Lyabedzka told journalists. The state benefits are to be abolished under a bill that was passed in May and signed by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in June. In particular, the legislation will remove reduced transport fares for students and the holders of the Veteran of Labor title as well as make fewer people entitled to discounts on utility and phone bills and health services

October 12, 2007

PRO-EUROPEAN GROUP INAUGURATED IN MINSK

The European Integration Council (REI), established by former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, held its first meeting in Minsk on October 10, Belapan reported on October 11. Milinkevich told journalists on October 11 that the REI is a group of experts united around European values. The REI comprises some 30 people, including Milinkevich as its chairman, Tatsyana Protska, Valyantsin Akudovich, Ales Antsipenka, Lyudmila Hraznova, Mikhail Zaleski, Ivan Nikitchanka, and Ales Mikhalevich. Participants in the meeting decided that the REI will serve as a forum for the discussion and development of a strategy of Belarus's integration into Europe. Milinkevich said the council will campaign to inform the public about Europe and its integration; provide training both in Belarus and abroad to show opposition activists what present-day Europe is like and how to implement European programs in Belarus; analyze the situation in the country and devise strategies for the development of Belarusian society; and support national culture

October 15, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION STAGES 'EUROPEAN MARCH' IN MINSK

Several thousand demonstrators took part in the European March for Freedom on October 14 in Minsk to press for closer links between Belarus and the EU, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Disobeying the city authorities' ban on the march in downtown Minsk, some 2,000 people went to October Square and marched several kilometers along the capital's main thoroughfare, Independence Avenue, to the Academy of Sciences, where another group of demonstrators gathered. "Belarus will be

in Europe. We'll build a country that we won't be ashamed of. A free, fair, and real one," opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich told the crowd in front of the Academy of Sciences. Other speakers urged the government to fulfill the 12 conditions that the EU has set for Minsk before it can join the European Neighborhood Policy. The conditions, publicized in November 2006, include holding free and fair elections, giving the opposition access to the state media, ensuring freedom of association, releasing political prisoners, and abolishing the death penalty. After marching from the Academy of Sciences to Bangalore Square on the city's outskirts, the demonstrators dispersed without any arrests being made. Police detained several dozen opposition activists last week in an apparent attempt to prevent them from participating in the October 14 demonstration. BelaPAN reported that at least 25 of them were jailed on charges of using obscene language in a public place.

October 30, 2007
BELARUSIAN ACTIVISTS MARK REMEMBRANCE DAY FOR VICTIMS OF STALIN ERA

Activists on October 29 held a day of commemoration for the victims of repression in Belarus under Soviet leader Josef Stalin, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The event was organized by a civic committee dedicated to commemorating the 70th anniversary of the execution of around 100 prominent Belarusian intellectuals by Stalin's secret police. The committee, formed in November 2006 and led by geologist Radzim Haretski, historian Ihar Kuzniatsou, and writer Vasil Yakavenka, has called on the Belarusian authorities to commemorate victims at the government level, but the request has been rejected by the State Security Committee (KGB). According to the committee, the Soviet regime in Belarus killed or imprisoned at least 1 million people, 600,000 of whom were sent to labor camps, between the 1920s and the 1950s.

November 5, 2007
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION HOLDS 'SOCIAL MARCH' IN MINSK

Around 1,000 people took part in the so-called Social March, organized by the Belarusian opposition, on November 4 in Minsk, Belapan reported. The participants protested against government plans to abolish the current state benefits and privileges received by certain categories of people, including retirees, people with some disabilities, Chernobyl cleanup veterans, blood donors, and students. Under a new law that will come into force on December 17, some beneficiaries will lose the benefit of paying half-fare on public transportation.



The demonstrators adopted a resolution demanding that that legislation be repealed, along with President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's decree barring small-business owners from hiring employees other than three family members. The resolution also called for the government to convene a "public council" for representatives of political parties, independent trade unions, and nongovernmental organizations to discuss the government's economic and social policies.

November 20, 2007
BELARUSIAN VENDORS RALLY AGAINST PLANNED RESTRICTIONS

Over 2,000 market vendors on November 19 attended a rally in Minsk against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's decree imposing more restrictive conditions for running businesses, Belapan reported. Under the decree, starting from January 1, 2008, certain small-business owners will be barred from hiring employees other than three family members. The demonstrators adopted a resolution demanding a meeting with Lukashenka. They also requested that Lukashenka ask the Belarusian Constitutional Court to examine the legality of the restrictions. Market vendors have already made unsuccessful attempts to push for a court hearing by appealing to Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski, both chambers of the Belarusian legislature, and the Supreme Court. "The grievances of entrepreneurs are turning into the grievances of people encountering red tape and irresponsible bureaucrats," Anatol Shumchanka, the chairman of the Perspektyva vendors' association, told the rally.

December 3, 2007
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION READY TO ASK U.S. TO LIFT SANCTIONS

Belarusian opposition leaders on November 30 agreed on a statement to the government promising that they will ask the United States to lift its sanctions against Belarus if the Belarusian government takes steps toward democratization, Belapan reported. The petition was signed by former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich; Anatol Liabedzka, the chairman of the United Civic Party; Siarhey Kaliakin, the leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists; Anatol Liaukovich, acting chairman of the Social Democratic Party; youth activists Zmitser Fedaruk and Pavel Seviarynets; and Enira Branitskaya. All of them will visit the United States between December 2 and 8. "We call on the Belarusian government to start abiding by generally accepted democratic principles and release all political prisoners, stop the persecution of opposition activists, and create equal conditions for the media," the statement said. In exchange, the opposition leaders promised to appeal to the U.S. government to encourage investment in the Belarusian economy, give a loan to the Belarusian government to carry out market reforms, and alleviate the consequences of higher energy prices, as well as to ask Washington to lift the sanctions against Belarusian officials and state-run enterprises. "Our abilities in Washington, Berlin, Vilnius, Warsaw are far greater than the Belarusian authorities have, this is unquestionable," RFE/RL's Belarus Service quoted Lyabedzka as saying.

December 6, 2007
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST URGES EU, U.S. TO SPEAK TO MINSK IN 'ONE VOICE'

Anatol Liabedzka, the leader of the United Civic Party (AHP), said on December 4 in Washington that the European Commission and the U.S. State Department should resume sending joint delegations to Belarus, Belapan reported. "It is better to speak to Minsk in one voice, having a single stance," Liabedzka said dur-

ing a hearing at the U.S. Congress on the situation in Belarus. He proposed holding a conference on the situation in Belarus bringing together Belarusian government officials and opposition politicians with representatives of the European Union, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and their parliamentary organizations. "The condition for holding this conference initiated by the European Union is the [Belarusian authorities'] release of political prisoners," said Liabedzka, adding that such a conference would clearly indicate whether the Belarusian government is ready for reform

December 10, 2007
BELARUSIAN POPULAR FRONT ELECTS NEW CHAIRMAN

The opposition Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) on December 9 elected Liavon Barshcheuski as its new chairman, BelaPAN reported. Nearly 250 delegates who met at the BNF convention on December 8 and 9 in Minsk failed to elect a new leader during the first day of the convention. Vintsuk Viachorka and Ales Mikhalevich, two nominees for the post, each won about 50 percent of the vote, but neither managed to cross the 50 percent threshold required by the BNF's charter. Vyachorka and Mikhalevich then withdrew their candidacies and put forward Barshcheuski as a compromise candidate to avoid splitting the BNF. Barshcheuski was a lawmaker in the Belarusian legislature between 1990 and 1995 and an acting chairman of the BNF between 1995 and 1999. "We respect the principles of the coalition [of United Pro-Democratic Forces], but we care for the BNF first of all," Barshcheuski said after his election. "We want it to remain one of the symbols of the independence of modern Belarus," he added.

December 11, 2007
BELARUSIAN SMALL-BUSINESS OWNERS RALLY AGAINST RESTRICTIONS

Nearly 1,000 entrepreneurs took part in an unsanctioned demonstration in Minsk on December 10 against a presidential decree restricting the activities of small businesses, Belapan reported. Under the decree, starting from January 1, 2008, certain small-business owners will be barred from hiring employees other than three family members. The protest was organized by the unregistered organization For The Free Development of Enterprise. "The year 2008 may become the last year in the history of Belarusian enterprise," Viktar Harbachou, the organization's leader, told the rally. Harbachou warned that 10,000 people in each region might lose their jobs if the restriction comes into force. The protesters adopted and delivered to the cabinet a resolution urging the authorities to consider the legality of the decree and implement the EU's 12 demands for reform, including reform of the independent judiciary and liberalization of regulations governing private businesses. Police officers detained several protest participants.

2. REGIME ACTIONS & STATEMENTS

October 15, 2007
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT PLEDGES TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE RUSSIA IN POTENTIAL CONFLICT...

In his comments to Russian journalists, President Lukashenka said that Russia has no allies but Belarus in its objections to U.S. plans to establish elements of a missile-defense shield in the Czech Republic and Poland, BelaPAN reported. "Who can you rely on here? On Ukraine, which wants to be in NATO? On the Baltic states and Poland, which already are in NATO? Do you have armed forces to contain [attacks], apart from the Belarusian army, west of Moscow?" Lukashenka said. He stressed that it was his idea to integrate the military forces of both countries, saying that he made such a proposal to former Russian President Boris Yeltsin and then convinced Russian President Vladimir Putin to sign an agreement on a joint force. "I was thinking not only about myself and the Belarusians, but also about how our union state commitments would be met within the framework of the Belarusian-Russian Union. I thought that we should defend our territory together and the land that once fed us with cheap hydrocarbons," Lukashenka said. In the case of a European conflict, he added: "We would die for Russia here. We cannot let tanks advance [across Belarus] toward Moscow."

October 15, 2007
..AND REMAINS SKEPTICAL ABOUT CURBING HEAVY DRINKING

President Lukashenka also told Russian journalists that he is skeptical about any official efforts to curb the hard-drinking culture deeply rooted in Belarus, Belapan reported. "I don't believe that there will be a time when Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians stop drinking. This is our national tradition," the Belarusian president asserted. "We say that it's better to drink low-alcohol beverages, but we will drink anyway. It's inevitable," he added. Lukashenka revealed that he is not an alcohol lover. "I don't like beer at all. It has a bitter, nasty taste for me," he said. But Lukashenka also confessed that he has to drink in his role as president. "I'm not saying that I don't drink; how can a president not drink? Just imagine that there are presidents sitting around a table — they are not just drinking, but drinking well, especially those from ex-Soviet countries." Lukashenka recalled his drinking sessions with former Russian President Yeltsin, recalling that it took him days to recover afterward.

November 1, 2007
BELARUSIAN ENVOY TRIES FOR DAMAGE CONTROL AFTER PRESIDENT'S ANTI-SEMITIC REMARKS

Pavel Yakubovich, the editor in chief of *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, the largest state-run newspaper, said on October 31 at the Israeli Foreign Ministry that President Lukashenka's recent comments about Jews should be regarded as "a joke" and "not serious," BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. An Israeli Foreign Ministry official said the matter has been resolved. Addressing a group of Russian journalists on October 12, Lukashenka said Jewish residents had turned the city of Babruysk in Mahilyou Oblast into a "pigsty." Yakubovich said that Lukashenka's remarks should be assessed as "anything but anti-Semitic," adding that accusations of anti-Semitism insulted the president.

November 13, 2007
PRESIDENT CONGRATULATES NEW HEAD OF BELARUSIAN CATHOLICS

At a ceremony in Minsk's Holy Virgin Cathedral on November 10, Roman Catholic Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz was named to head the Minsk-Mahilyou Archdiocese, Belarusian media reported. The ceremony was attended by representatives of the Belarusian government and guests from the Vatican, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine. Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka congratulated Kondrusiewicz and described him as a "compatriot who enjoys well-deserved respect and authority among representatives of different faiths."

Kondrusiewicz urged the Roman Catholic clergy and believers, as well as Belarusian intellectuals, to participate "in the spiritual revival of the homeland." Pope Benedict XVI appointed Kondrusiewicz to head the Minsk-Mahilyou Archdiocese in September. Kondrusiewicz previously served as an auxiliary bishop of the Moscow Archdiocese.

November 15, 2007
BELARUS THREATENS RETALIATION FOR U.S. ECONOMIC SANCTIONS

Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Papou warned on November 14 that Minsk will retaliate in response to the economic sanctions imposed by Washington on Belarus's largest petrochemical company, Belnaftakhim, Belapan reported. The U.S. Treasury Department has frozen any assets under U.S. jurisdiction belonging to the company and its representatives, and forbids Americans from doing business with the company, which it says is controlled by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka). "Under the circumstances of the unfriendly actions on the part of the United States, Belarus will have to respond adequately," Papou said. "The Republic of Belarus regards as unacceptable the application of unilateral economic measures [based on] political motives, which not only have a negative impact on the economy and the sphere of development, but also have a bad effect on international economic cooperation on the whole." Papou also accused the United States of violating a 1994 memorandum under which Washington agreed not to apply "measures of economic compulsion for the purpose of subjecting Belarus to the interests of the United States" in exchange for the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Belarus.

November 19, 2007
BELARUSIAN EDUCATION MINISTER HEADS PRO-PRESIDENTIAL MOVEMENT

The founding conference of the pro-presidential nationwide movement Belaya Rus on November 17 elected Education Minister Alyaksandr Radzkou as the movement's chairman, Belapan reported. The conference in Minsk brought together 380 delegates representing all regions of Belarus. They adopted a charter for the movement stating that the mission of Belaya Rus will be to "contribute to the building of a strong and prosperous Belarus and participate in matters of the development of the country." Radzkou promised that the movement will soon develop into the "most numerous public force" in Belarus, and will certainly take part in the 2008 parliamentary elections. Radzkou also said that all of independent Belarus' achievements are closely linked to Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. "Today it's obvious to all that the course chosen by the president has proved its viability," Radzkou said.

November 26, 2007
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION ATTRACTS BANNED ROCK MUSICIANS

Aleh Praliaskouski, an aide to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, on November 21 promised the leaders of four Belarusian rock bands informally banned from public performances that the ban might be removed, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported. A number of Belarusian musicians were banned from performing publicly in Belarus after they played at concerts during an opposition demonstration in 2004. Praliaskouski reportedly promised the leaders of Palats, Krama, N.R.M., and Neuro Dubel that there would be no problems with concerts in Belarus and performance on state-run television if the musicians "do not get into politics." "That was an attempt by the authorities to use us, because the current political situation suggests that it is us who they need," Pit Paulau of the N.R.M. band said on November 23. "Nobody offered us 30 pieces of silver," he added, commenting on the avalanche of criticism from fans that followed the meeting with Praliaskouski.

November 27, 2007
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ACCUSES EUROPE OF 'UNACCEPTABLE TERMS'

Alyaksandr Lukashenka on November 26 said in an interview with the Spanish daily *El Pais* that the European Union does not want the normalization of relations with Belarus. Lukashenka said that "Europe has gone too far and does not know today how to get out of this, saving its face." "If the European Union has enough determination to do that, we will be sitting at one table and holding a dialogue to be closer. We want this, but the EU does not want this and puts forward unacceptable terms," he said. The Kyiv-based European Commission delegation to Belarus and Ukraine issued a statement last week on the occasion of the first anniversary of the European Commission report titled "What the European Union Could Bring to Belarus." "The EU's offer to Belarus remains valid," the delegation said, adding that the conditions for the improvement of relations between Belarus and the EU include "the release of all political prisoners, respect for freedom of speech and of association, the holding of free and fair elections, the investigation of the cases of missing persons, and respect for the rights of minorities."

November 29, 2007
AMNESTY COMES INTO FORCE IN BELARUS

An amnesty providing for the release of almost 1,700 prisoners came into force in Belarus on November 28 with its publication in the newspaper *Respublika*, BelaPAN reported. The Belarusian legislature adopted the bill on October 24, and Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed it on November 22. The amnesty was issued with the goal of saving $935,000 in public funds each year. It applies to people convicted of crimes punishable by no more than six years in prison and who have served at least one-third of their sentences; war veterans; people of retirement age; pregnant women; people with disabilities; youths under 18; parents of children under 18; former Chornobyl cleanup workers; people with HIV or tuberculosis; and those injured while working. The amnesty does not apply to those who committed crimes after having been amnestied previously, or those with poor disciplinary records.

3. REPRESSIONS

October 9, 2007
BELARUSIAN SUPREME COURT DENIES REGISTRATION TO OPPOSITION YOUTH GROUP

Belarus's Supreme Court on October 8 rejected an appeal by the opposition Youth Front against the denial of its attempts at registration, Belapan reported. In August, a similar appeal was rejected by the Minsk City Court. In explaining its ruling, the Supreme Court said that some of the Youth Front's founders have faced administrative and criminal prosecution and hence cannot act as founders of a nongovernmental organization. These people "were convicted for acting on behalf of an unregistered organization. Nevertheless, we are denied the opportunity to obtain registration yet again.... This is a vicious circle," Anastasiya Loyka, a representative of the Youth Front, argued before the court. "De-

nying registration to a nongovernmental organization on the grounds that its founders were prosecuted for acting on behalf of an unregistered organization in the past is absurd. It's absolutely clear that this decision is politically motivated," former Youth Front leader Pavel Seviarynets told the agency. The Youth Front is reportedly planning to take its case to international organizations, including the UN Human Rights Committee.

October 1, 2007

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES JAIL OPPOSITIONISTS AHEAD OF 'EUROPEAN MARCH'

Vasil Paliakou and Uladzimir Katsora, activists of the opposition United Civic Party in Homel, were sentenced to seven days in jail each on charges of using foul language in a public place, Belapan reported. Katsora told journalists that his arrest is linked to the forthcoming visit of European diplomats to Homel and the opposition's European March for Freedom scheduled to take place in Minsk on October 14. "I was told [by police officers] that I shouted obscenities at 2 p.m. today at the intersection between Dakutovicha Street and Kirava Street, although I actually stayed in another place at the time and there were witnesses to that," Palyakou noted shortly after his arrest. "I guess I will be released only after the ambassadors of EU countries visit Homel and after the European March is over in Minsk," he added. The same day in Minsk, Yauhen Afnahel, one of the organizers of the European March for Freedom, was sentenced to 10 days in jail, also on charges of speaking obscenities in a public place. Afnahel was arrested on October 8, immediately after a meeting of the march's organizers with representatives of the Minsk City Executive Committee, at which both sides discussed preparations for the event. The Minsk City Executive Committee reportedly authorized the march but demanded a change to its planned route in downtown Minsk. More detentions of opposition activists were reported on October 9 in Minsk and Hrodna.

October 24, 2007

BELARUSIAN UNIVERSITY EXPELS CAMPAIGNER AGAINST REDEVELOPMENT OF HISTORIC DOWNTOWN

Katsyaryna Bychak, a student who campaigned against what she called the destructive redevelopment of Hrodna's historic center, was expelled from Yanka Kupala State University of Hrodna for violating the university's regulations, BelapPAN reported on October 23. Bychak, a second-year law student, told the agency that she was arrested in May 2006 while trying, along with other young people, to protect a 19th century mill from demolition. "No disciplinary action for my participation in the campaign was taken at the university," she said, adding that officers of the Committee for State Security (KGB) visited her at home and asked questions about the campaign. "The dean dismissed the justification I offered for missing eight days of classes in September and kicked me out," she said. Pavel Mazheyka, a prominent opposition activist in Hrodna, described Bychak's expulsion as "politically motivated." He said the prodemocratic community in the city will help her file an appeal against the expulsion and, if the appeal fails, will assist her in finding an opportunity to study abroad

October 25, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER AGAIN BLOCKED FROM REGISTERING HIS MOVEMENT

The Justice Ministry has turned down a second application for registration from the Movement for Freedom, an organization led by former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, Belapan reported. The ministry explained that the organization's founding conference, which was held on the property of a children's summer camp in Minsk Oblast, violated a law governing mass events. "The law on mass events does not govern founding conferences for nongovernmental organizations and we did not have to apply for permission to authorities [to hold the conference]. There is no such practice," Yury Hubarevich from the Movement for Freedom told journalists. "Of course we will appeal this decision by the justice ministry to the Supreme Court. And we will continue applying for registration," he said, adding that the movement will send a complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee if the Supreme Court upholds the registration denial. The justice ministry rejected the organization's first application for registration earlier this year, citing alleged flaws in the organization's charter. The Supreme Court upheld that decision last month .

October 29, 2007

BELARUSIAN SUPREME COURT DENIES REGISTRATION TO HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

Belarus's Supreme Court upheld on October 26 the denial of the registration of the Vyasna (Spring) human rights group, which is a successor of the prominent human rights organization Vyasna closed by the authorities in October 2003, Belapan reported. The Justice Ministry refused in August to register the group, claiming that its charter does not meet the requirements specified in a law on nongovernmental organizations. "It is absolutely clear that this decision is political. All of the flaws that led to the registration denial could be eliminated within a day," Vyasna founder Ales Byalyatski said. Group leaders intend to complain about the registration denial and the Supreme Court's ruling to the UN Human Rights Committee.

November 13, 2007

BELARUSIAN YOUTH ACTIVIST FINED FOR REFUSING TO TESTIFY

The district court in Shklou on November 9 fined Zmitser Dashkevich $870 for refusing to testify against his friend, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Dashkevich, who is currently serving an 18-month term for heading an unregistered organization, the Youth Front, has refused to give testimony in a similar case against another Youth Front activist, Ivan Shyla. Dashkevich claimed that the law gives him the right not to testify against himself or those close to him. The trial was held behind closed doors in the correctional facility where Dashkevich is incarcerated. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the European Union's commissioner for external relations and neighborhood policy, has condemned the fine imposed on Dashkevich, adding that it "utterly contradicts the principles and values laid down in the EU's message to Belarus which I released a year ago."

December 12, 2007

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES SENTENCE ORGANIZERS, PARTICIPANTS OF VENDORS' PROTEST

A Minsk district court on December 11 sentenced several activists for organizing or participating in an unsanctioned rally on December 10 against the presidential decree restricting the activities of small businesses, BelaPAN reported. The court sentenced activists Viktar Harbachou and Viktar Kryval to 15 days in jail for organizing the rally, and Viktar Kaley and Alyaksandr Tsatsura received 10 days — the former for organizing the rally and the latter for alleged foul language in a public place. Alyaksandr Makayeu was sentenced to seven days in jail for obscenities in a public place. Kryval, Kaley, Tsatsura, and Makayeu were among those who earlier applied to Minsk city authorities for permission to hold the rally. The same day, a court also sentenced Viktar Ivashkevich, deputy head of the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF), to 15 days in jail for obscene language, and young opposition activists Barys Haretski and Krystsina Shatsikava for participating in an unsanctioned rally to seven days in jail and to a 700,000-ruble ($325) fine, respectively.

4. BELARUS & the WORLD

September 24, 2007

EU TO LAUNCH TWO PROJECTS FOR INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN BELARUS

The European Commission intends to launch two projects supporting Belarus's independent media outlets at the end of 2007 or the beginning of 2008, Belapan reported on September 19, quoting Armin Wisdorff, an official from the commission's EuropeAid Cooperation Office. The first project, with a budget of 500,000 euros ($700,000), will be aimed at helping independent media outlets develop electronic content covering the European Union and events in Belarus. The second project will be carried out as part of the EU's media-support program targeting EU neighbors. The overall program will be supported by a budget of 7 million euros.

October 17, 2007

BELARUS RANKS LOW ON ANNUAL PRESS FREEDOM INDEX

The media rights group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) on October 16 publicized its annual Worldwide Press Freedom Index, which ranks 169 countries worldwide according to their level of press freedom. Belarus ranked 151st out of 169 countries. Uzbekistan, ranked 160th, and Turkmenistan, ranked 167th, are the only other post-Soviet states in the bottom 20 countries of the index. Ukraine was classified at 92nd place and Russia at 144th. One "topic of concern is Belarus, which as you know is one of the last dictatorships very close to Europe," Elsa Vidal from RSF's European and post-Soviet countries desk told RFE/RL. "Unfortunately we even very recently witnessed arrests, preventative arrests, of opponents and independent journalists to prevent them from witnessing and [taking part] in an opposition march that took place last weekend," Vidal said.

October 17, 2007

PACE ENVOY STUDIES SITUATION IN BELARUS

Andrea Rigoni, the special rapporteur on Belarus in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), arrived in Minsk on October 16, Belapan reported. The visit is Rigoni's first to Belarus as PACE envoy. "We would like to know whether Belarus has made some steps closer to the Council of Europe," Rigoni told journalists on October 17, following a meeting with Vadzim Papou, the chairman of the Chamber of Representatives, Belarus's lower house. Rigoni said the aim of his trip to Belarus is to prepare a report on the situation there, which will be made public at the beginning of 2008.

October 20, 2007

PACE HEAD SEEKS APOLOGY FOR BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT'S ANTI-SEMITIC COMMENTS

Rene van der Linden, the president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), said on October 22 that President Alyaksandr Lukashenka should apologize for his remarks about Jews earlier this month, Belapan reported. Speaking to a group of Russian journalists on October 12, Lukashenka said Jewish residents turned the city of Babruysk in Mahilyou Oblast into a "pigsty." "President Lukashenka should reflect on this and apologize for his disgraceful words, if he is serious in his desire to move closer to the rest of Europe," van der Linden said. "The Council of Europe, as a value community, was created as the first step in a process of European integration intended to prevent the re-emergence of intolerance and extremism in Europe. The fight against anti-Semitism has been a priority of the Council of Europe since 1949 and will continue to be so for as long as the threat remains. Rejection of anti-Semitism is a universal principle," he added.

October 21, 2007

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCHDOG SEEKS RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN BELARUS

Souhayr Belhassen, the president of the International Federation for Human Rights (IFHR), called in Minsk on November 1 for the international community to "mobilize" to secure the release of four Belarusian detainee — Zmitser Dashkevich, Artur Finkevich, Andrey Klimau, and Alyaksandr Kazulin — who are widely considered political prisoners, Belhassen said efforts by European politicians to deal with violations of human rights in Belarus are insufficient. "It is not enough to ban officials whom the international community believes to be involved in human rights abuses from entry to European Union member countries," she said. "It is necessary to support human rights groups and other nongovernmental organizations that in fact operate underground in Belarus." Belhassen described as "ridiculous" new charges brought by the Belarusian authorities against Youth Front activists Dashkevich and Finkevich; Dashkevich faces new charges for refusing to testify against his friends, and Finkevich for violating the internal regulations of the correctional facility where he is detained. Belhassen also announced the establishment of a committee to support Klimau, who was sentenced in August to two years in prison for allegedly calling for the overthrow of the government in an article posted on the Internet.

November 9, 2007

EU DIPLOMATS CALL ON BELARUS TO RELEASE POLITICAL PRISONERS

The Slovak Embassy in Minsk has issued a statement calling on the Belarusian authorities to end their "repressive practices" against civil society, respect the human rights of Belarusians, and release all political prisoners, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on November 8. Slovakia acts as the local EU president in Minsk, where EU president Portugal does not have diplomatic representation. The Slovak Embassy issued the statement after a November 7 meeting between the heads of EU countries' diplomatic missions in Minsk and Alyaksandr Milinkevich, a former presidential candidate and the leader of the unregistered

Movement for Freedom. Milinkevich drew attention to the situation of Alyaksandr Kazulin, Artur Finkevich, Zmitser Dashkevich, and Andrey Klimau, all described as political prisoners. Milinkevich noted Klimau's deteriorating health, and added that Dashkevich is currently on trial behind closed doors. "The EU's local presidency expresses the deep concern of European diplomats in Minsk over the situation of Belarusians who are believed by the international human rights organizations to be political prisoners," the Slovak statement reads.

November 14, 2007
U.S. FREEZES ASSETS OF BELARUS'S LARGEST PETROCHEMICAL COMPANY

The U.S. Treasury Department on November 13 announced financial sanctions against Belneftekhim, a Belarusian state-owned petrochemical company, stating that it is controlled by Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. The move by the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control freezes any assets under U.S. jurisdiction belonging to Belneftekhim, and bars U.S. citizens from doing business with the company. The measures apply to Belneftekhim's offices in Germany, Latvia, Ukraine, Russia, China, and its wholly owned U.S. subsidiary, Belneftekhim USA.. Adam Szubin, the director of the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, said the "action tightens sanctions against Lukashenka by imposing financial sanctions against a massive conglomerate under the regime's control." In a statement, the Treasury Department noted that "today's action follows the 2006 blocking of the assets of Lukashenka and nine other senior officials of his administration. In February 2007, Treasury blocked the assets of another six high-ranking Belarusian officials, bringing the total number of designated officials to 16." U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs David Kramer recently warned of new sanctions against Belarus because of the pressures its government places on civil society and its violations of democratic standards.


"No to alliances with imperial Russia"

November 19, 2007
U.S. OFFICIAL LINKS SANCTIONS ON BELARUS TO STATUS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs David Kramer told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service that the United States will maintain its sanctions against Belarus unless the government releases all political prisoners, the service reported on November 16. Kramer said that there is a small number of political prisoners in Belarus, but "all of them are important." As long as they are incarcerated, Kramer continued, U.S. authorities will be forced to take steps against Belarus. "It is time for Belarus to act as a respectful member of the OSCE," he added. The United States has imposed financial sanctions and travel bans on Belarusian officials over Minsk's violations of human rights and democratic principles. on the grounds that it is controlled by President Lukashenka.

November 26, 2007
UN CRITICIZES BELARUSIAN HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

A UN General Assembly committee on November 21 voted 68 to 32 with 76 abstentions in favor of a resolution criticizing Belarus' human rights record and calling for an end to politically motivated persecution in the country, Belapan reported. The resolution was submitted by the United States, the European Union, Israel, Canada, Switzerland, and Japan. The document expresses concern "that the situation of human rights in Belarus in 2007 continued to significantly deteriorate." It cites the "severely flawed" presidential election in March 2006 "due to arbitrary use of state power" and the government's failure to ensure that local elections in January 2007 met international standards, including its use of intimidation and arbitrary registration standards to exclude opposition candidates. The document expresses "deep concern" at the government's continued use of criminal prosecution to silence political opponents, human rights defenders, and journalists. It calls on the Belarusian government "to release immediately and unconditionally all individuals detained for politically motivated reasons and other individuals detained for exercising or promoting human rights." In response, Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Papou pointed out that only a third of UN members backed the resolution. "We are certain that the resolution on Belarus adopted by the UN Third Committee has neither legal nor political grounds," he said.

December 14, 2007
U.S. CONGRESSMAN CONDEMNS BEATING OF BELARUSIAN YOUTH ACTIVIST

U.S. Representative Alcee Hastings (Democrat, Florida), chairman of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the Helsinki Commission), has condemned the beating of youth activist Zmitser Fedaruk, who was knocked unconscious during a clash with riot police following a demonstration in Minsk's central square ahead of the December 13-14 visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on December 12. Fedaruk, 19, was taken to the hospital, where he regained consciousness but was not able to talk or respond to questions. "The merciless beating of Fedaruk is both outrageous and tragic," Hastings said in a statement. He noted that last week Fedaruk addressed the Helsinki Commission in Washington and talked about the threats opposition activists face in Belarus. Hastings said he not only supports Fedaruk's struggle for freedom, but also strongly condemns acts of violence against innocent people. "Unfortunately, the intimidation and abuse by [Belarusian President Alyaksandr] Lukashenka's regime does not seem to be coming to an end anytime soon," he added. Nearly 100 opposition activists gathered on December 12 in downtown Minsk to demonstrate against the possible threat to Belarus's independence represented by Putin's visit. Protesters waved white-red-white flags — the official symbol of independent Belarus before Lukashenka became president in 1994 and banned the flag the following year — and shouted, "Long live Belarus" and "No to alliances with imperial Russia."

Culture & Society

Rock for Belarus?

By Barys Tumar

In Belarus, several rock bands, such as Krama, Neuro Dubel, N.R.M. and Palac are "blacklisted." Because of the critical political views of their leaders, their songs are banned from radio rotation, the bands are not invited to television shows, and their concerts are often not allowed to take place under different pretexts.

Aleh Praliaskouski, head of the Ideology Department of Presidential Administration, made the unexpected move. On Nov. 21 he invited leaders of the most popular blacklisted Belarusian groups to his office for a conversation. Aleh Pralyaskouski not only acknowledged the sad fact that some musicians are prevented from performing, but also proposed them to become… friends. He even offered them the state help and support in organizing a major concert "Rock for Belarus". The musicians, however, refused to sing under this politically charged motto ("for Belarus" is the slogan of all major pro-Lukashenka political campaigns). **"Then, why don't you come up with the concert title which suits you?"** suggested the chief Belarusian ideologist.

Ihar Varashkevich, singer of the rock band Krama says that **"the conversation was a rather constructive one. We have made our position clear, and nobody demanded that we repent our alleged sins or something. On the contrary, we received a promise that we will not be hindered in our work in the future".**

Aleh Praliaskouski called the recent ideological crackdown on Belarusian musicians **"excesses in the work of local authorities"**. (On Nov. 14, the presentation of the new album "Stasi" by Neuro Dubel was not allowed to take place in one of Minsk clubs; in another incident, the authorities voiced their determination to ban the independent annual rock festival "Rock-Kola", which has been held annually for 17 years).

Alyaksandar Kulinkovich, leader of Neuro Dubel, called this **"a shock"** and wrote an open letter about the state of Belaurusian independent rock music – a voice in the wilderness, which was unexpectedly heard by the Ideology Department.

The audience of NN.by is split in its opinion. Some see this conversation as a good sign, other call the musicians traitors.

As Aleh Khamenka, leader of folk-rock group Palac, said in his interview with the Belarusian service of Radio Liberty **"we were prepared to see that all this will be actively discussed. I want to encourage everyone to look at the results, which, I hope, this discussion will bring. I think there is still a chance that a major shift in the today's Belarusian state ideology takes place. Hopefully, it will improve the position of the Belarusian language of modern Belarusian musicians, and Belarusian politics as the whole."**



Kasia Kamotskaya

The move by Aleh Praliaskouski indeed seems to be a sign of the changing ideological policy. Pavel Yakubovich, head of *Belarus Segodnya,* the daily mouthpiece of the President, has recently invited some blacklisted musicians to his headquarters for a discussion. The authorities also encourage the non-registered youth organizations (such as Malady Front) to get legal and participate in the official youth work (a rather cynical offer, considering the fact that the Malady Front leaders are now in jail).

Kasia Kamotskaya, leader of rock group *Novaye Neba,* is rather skeptical about the conversation with Praliaskouski: **"What can I say? It's a dialogue between a cat and a mouse".**

Nasha Niva editorial comment:

"First of all, such a move shows that authorities failed to subdue the Belarusian rock to their will. But if you fail to subdue someone, you can always try to bribe him. This is the logic of the official morality. In any case, today we celebrate a great victory of our music and our language. Let them sound, and the time will settle everything."

Source: *Nasha Niva,* NearBY Blogs, Nov. 22, 2007

Exhibition of Unique Historical Prints

This exhibition, officially entitled "Publications of Vilnia (Vilnius) Printing Shops from the 16th century through the early 20th century," was held in Miensk in November of 2007. It was organized in cooperation with the library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, who supplied 41 of 121 exhibits.

Originally the exhibition was scheduled for only 4 days; however, due to the extraordinary public interest, it had to be extended until the end of November.

The oldest exhibit was the Evangelium by Piotra Mstsislavets, printed in 1575.

The visitors could also see the original editions of *Nasha Niva* from the beginning of the 20th century, as well as literary works by classics of modern Belarusian literature: Maksim Bahdanovich, Yanka Kupala, Tsiotka...

Source: Web site of the Polish Radio - **www.-polskieradio.pl/zagranica/**

The Future Belarus: Democracy or Dictatorship?

(Continued from page 3)

Mr. Anatol Liabedzka:

It is a great honor for me to speak in the US Congress. The hearings today are a direct testimony of the fact that Belarus is still on the international agenda. I represent the team of political optimists in Belarus. Possibly, pessimists' appraisals will be more accurate, but I am convinced that only optimists will be able to bring changes to Belarus.

... I am ashamed that Belarus remains the last enclave of dictatorship on the map of Europe. I know that Belarus and its people deserve better. This "better" is democracy, and European values and standards. The solution of the Belarusian problem is in Minsk, not Washington D.C., Moscow, or Brussels. No one will solve our problems for us. We do not expect a miracle to happen in 2008. This year is very special for us. This is the year of the 90th anniversary of the Belarusian Democratic Republic and the year of the parliamentary election in Belarus. It lays special responsibility on all change supporters. As the leader of political optimists, I believe in the inevitability of changes and in the future of Belarus.

Ms. Enira Branitskaya:

I would like to speak about repressions against youth in Belarus and a central realm of freedom – the right to education. Problems in this sphere in Belarus are not new, but the situation is becoming much worse.

The young generation is the most active group in Belarus. They were the most active participants in the peaceful civil opposition of March 2006. For the most part, it is youth between the ages of 19 and 25–students in different universities and colleges that are active. Youth in Belarus are not afraid to be arrested. Yet, authorities are looking for new ways to put pressure on them.

Belarusian universities have a lot of possible avenues through which to pressure students. Since 2005, all students who want to study abroad, in a foreign institution of higher education, on a temporary or exchange basis, are required to obtain written permission from the Ministry of Education.

Universities in Belarus are becoming less and less about education and more about ensuring that citizens are ideologically aligned with the regime. The Ministry of Education of Belarus has prepared a decree that now is waiting to be signed by the president. According to this decree, those entering the university next year will be required to participate in interviews to determine their level of ideological commitment. Without a positive score in these interviews, students will be unable to pursue different humanities specialties in the universities.

... During the last year, we regularly received information about pressure on school children. But, the administrations of Belarusian educational establishments enjoy impunity. More attention should be paid to these cases. Each case of such pressure or exclusion must be known and criticized by democratic forces and the international community. Further, any contacts and funding between the European Union, and other European and American organizations with university administrations who participate in these political repressions, should be ended.

(Full text of testimonies by Mr. Liabedzka and Ms. Branitskaya may be found online - on our Website :
www.belarusianreview.org

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